Meg Moorhouse

A bereavement counsellor with an attitude of gratitude

Meg Moorhouse is a social worker who has worked in the grief and loss space across many settings for more than 25 years. She is currently a bereavement counsellor with the allied care team at Melbourne City Mission Palliative Care.

"I have been in this position for about six years and am very fortunate and grateful to be working in the space," said Ms Moorhouse.

"I've always known that I wanted a career in grief support and that I have capacity to work alongside the bereaved. I think now that palliative care is where my career was heading all along. Community palliative care is a unique setting – being a social worker who likes to support people in their family and community context, I always knew it was the right place for me to move into and it's such a special place to work," she said.

Melbourne City Mission is a community support organisation working alongside people to live the life they aspire to, their way, providing a broad range of support in homelessness, early years, justice, disability, palliative care, early childhood intervention services, and education service areas.

"Melbourne City Mission was a pioneer in setting up the first palliative care hospice in Melbourne during the late 1970s and has a strong reputation as a centre of experience and excellence in community palliative care," she said.

"We provide expert symptom management and pay particular attention to physical, spiritual, social and cultural needs, ensuring that dignity and quality of life are at the forefront of everything we do."

Ms Moorhouse said being able to give people time and support when they're at their most vulnerable is both humbling and rewarding.

"Often the people we support have never had so much care and attention before in their life. I'm working with a 50-year-old man with cerebral palsy and his 80-year-old mum died last year. He and his mum were co-caring for each other all their lives. Now, he is alone and tells me he's never felt disabled until now.

"Now that his mother has passed, he has lost his sense of purpose and motivation in life. To him, he now feels like a very isolated disabled bereaved person. The bereavement support we can offer him is just as vital as the medical care we gave his mum, because this man is having to learn how to live on his own with huge vulnerabilities. To be able to go into his home, where he feels comfortable, and continue his care after his mum has died is so important," she said.

Working through COVID and the strict Melbourne lockdowns will be a memory that will stick with Meg forever. With in-patient and hospital services changing suddenly and dramatically, there was a huge increase in demand for community palliative care services.

"Our workload doubled during the pandemic. People were so isolated, and we needed to be more supportive than ever before. The emotional and spiritual part of our work was just as vital as the medical part during COVID. Staff became counsellors because people were so anxious. It was really inspiring to see how our team stepped up and continue to step up for that sector," said Ms Moorhouse.

"To see our doctors, nurses and care staff respond to that need was so moving. They gave more than they had ever given before. I was so touched by the care and compassion demonstrated by all staff."

Ms Moorhouse said organisations like Palliative Care Victoria have helped with the increase of awareness of palliative care and its benefits.

"Palliative care supports us at the most vulnerable time of our life. It's reassuring to me because we are all going to be in the position of needing it one day," she said.

"Palliative Care Victoria is a responsive and growing peak body who help voice our experiences as frontline workers. Palliative Care Victoria is our backbone and our collective voice."