



**Justice**  
Families & Friends  
of Missing Persons

# **An evaluation:**

The Families and Friends of Missing  
Persons Unit support group meetings

Produced by the Families and Friends of Missing Persons Unit, NSW Department of Justice

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The FFMPU support group meetings for adult family members and friends of missing people have been running since 2010. During this time, the delivery of these groups has changed to meet the needs of group members.

An evaluation of the group meetings was carried out during August-October 2013. Thirty-seven evaluation forms were sent to families and friends who had attended at least one group meeting. Of the 37 evaluations sent, 12 evaluations were returned, a return rate of 32 percent.

The following aims guided the evaluation process:

- To gain an understanding of families' expectations about attending the group meetings and whether these have been met.
- To understand the therapeutic benefits families experience by attending a group and to ensure that families continue to receive these benefits in future meetings.
- To understand how information provided on ambiguous loss has made a difference for group members.
- To understand how information provided on grieving styles has made a difference for group members.
- To identify the future needs of group members.
- To improve the delivery of groups through facilitation, topics covered, format and structure of the groups.

This report details the findings and data collected from the evaluations received. Though the number of evaluations received is not statistically significant, the feedback from family members is valuable in assisting FFMPU in continuing to deliver the group program.

FFMPU would like to thank and acknowledge the honesty, time, and effort family members have taken to complete the evaluation forms.

## Who completed the evaluation forms

This section gives a snapshot of who returned and completed the evaluation forms. It is noted that the demographics of the family members<sup>1</sup> who completed the evaluation forms are not representative of all of the family members who attend or have attended the group meetings.

### Gender and age

Respondents were mainly women, with eight women and three men (one person did not identify their gender), aged 45 years and up. Five respondents were aged between 45 and 59; another five respondents between 60 and 74; and two people were over 75 years of age. The age of the respondents may indicate that family members and friends under 45 years may be less likely to attend an FFMPU group at all, or on an ongoing basis.

### Relationship to the missing person

Of the 12 respondents, 10 indicated their relationship to the missing person. Of the 10, eight were parents and two were spouses. In considering who the 37 evaluations were sent to, it can be said that parents make up the majority of FFMPU group members, with a smaller number of spouses (current or ex-partners), adult siblings and extended family members.

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<sup>1</sup> For ease and consistency, family members who provided feedback and completed their evaluation form will be referred to as 'respondents'.

Information on the relationship of respondents to the missing person may indicate that the missing person's adult children, adult siblings, or extended family and friends are either less likely to attend the groups on an ongoing basis or do not access the groups at all. Though the reasons for this are unknown, it could be speculated that reasons may include:

- different needs for attending a group compared to parents or spouses of missing people. For example, adult children or siblings may initially attend as a support person to a parent who is attending a group meeting;
- commitments such as work, family or study may impact on their ability to attend groups;
- given the age of the respondents, it is likely that respondents may be retired or may not be in full-time employment and therefore may have greater availability to attend the groups than family members who are working/studying;
- the need to attend a group on an ongoing basis may change over time and therefore they may only attend meetings occasionally.

## **Group attendance and length of time the person has been missing**

### **Length of time loved one has been missing**

There were 11 out of 12 respondents who provided information on the year their loved one went missing. The majority (8) indicated that their loved one has been missing between two years and less than six

years. One respondent indicated that their family member has been missing for 8-9 years and two other respondents indicated that their loved one has been missing for 10-11 years.

### **Learning that the group exists**

Finding out how respondents learned about the groups is important, as it may indicate how to best reach families and friends who are interested in attending future groups. Six respondents indicated that they learned about the group through an FFMPU staff member; while four said the NSW Police (includes the Missing Persons Unit or Officer in Charge) had informed them of the group. One person learned about the group through a friend and another by word of mouth. This indicates that services that come in direct contact with families and friends of missing people are more likely than any other means<sup>2</sup> to refer families to the groups.

### **Length of time respondents have been attending the groups**

Eleven respondents answered this question. Of these, seven have been attending for more than two years. These are also group members, whose loved one has been missing for more than three years, possibly indicating a strong feeling of group membership. This will be discussed further under 'Group Cohesion' in the Group Members' Expectations and Current Experiences section.

Of the other four respondents, one has attended for three months and less; and one each for 6-12 months; 12-18 months and 18-24 months. Given the small number of respondents, it is difficult to find a meaningful correlation for these four respondents between the length of time their family member has been missing and the length of time they have been attending the groups.

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2 Other means included: FFMPU website, internet search and newspaper article

## Group attendance

Of the 12 respondents, nine respondents indicated the group they primarily attend: six attended the Wollongong group and three the Sydney group. Four people indicated that they attended a second group: two said they attended the Campbelltown group (combined Sydney and Wollongong groups); one attends the Sydney group and another Wollongong group. This indicates that the Wollongong and Sydney groups are better attended than the other groups (Queanbeyan and Newcastle), and reasons for these may include:

- place of residence of family members who attend or are interested in attending the groups;
- difficulty for family members to travel to the regional groups (Queanbeyan and Newcastle).

Of the 12 respondents, nine indicated that they attended the groups either on a regular or sporadic basis. The nine consisted of four respondents who indicated they ‘always’ attend a group; two said they ‘often’ attend and three indicated they attended ‘sometimes’. There were three respondents who indicated that they ‘rarely’ (one respondent) or ‘never’ (two respondents) attended a group. As the criteria for inviting family members’ feedback on the groups was that they have attended at least one meeting, it is assumed that the latter three may have only attended one group rather than ‘never’ attending a group meeting, except if they were a spouse of someone who has attended, or instead attended an FFMPU event they did not identify as a group.

Previously, meetings were held on weekdays and weekends. Changes to the meeting times and days were made in an effort to increase access for potential attendees. Finding a meeting time that suits every family member is a considerable challenge. Competing priorities and commitments add to this. There were five respondents who indicated they were unable to attend groups due to work/study commitments (3); and family commitments (2). One respondent identified multiple reasons.

## Comment

Given the data available, it could be said that families and friends whose loved one has been missing for less than two years are less likely to attend a group at all or on an ongoing basis. This may indicate the different needs family members have for a group during the first two years their loved one is missing, or their readiness to attend a group.

Similarly, it could be said that family members whose loved one has been missing longer, have different needs and motivations for attending. As one respondent whose child has been missing for 10 years commented, “the opportunity to support others provides a meaningful reason to attend. There’s also an opportunity for personal reflection on some issues.” This comment highlights the benefit of altruism for group members, a concept that will be explored in the next section.

## Group members' expectations and current experiences

In an attempt to gain insight into group members' current experiences, their expectations and the benefits families receive by attending the groups, respondents were given a list of statements to rate in terms of importance.<sup>3</sup> The statements are based on five therapeutic factors characteristic of support groups.<sup>4</sup> These factors are:

- Altruism
- Group cohesion
- Universality
- Guidance through imparting information
- Catharsis
- Instillation of hope

Of the 12 respondents, 10 answered the statements that looked at their pre-group expectations and 11 out of 12 respondents rated statements on their current group experiences. The following pages include the information gathered under each therapeutic factor.

### Altruism

The group meetings offer group members opportunities to be helpful to one another. Altruism is the way a person responds that is helpful to another. Altruism includes the offer and giving of support, implicitly (such as in sharing one's story) or explicitly (such as offering suggestions or sharing what they found helpful).

Statements related to altruism included:

- a) putting other people's need ahead of mine, and
  - b) offering support to others.
- The combined average for statements related to altruism for pre-group expectations showed that:
    - for 60 percent of the respondents they found that it is important, of which 40 percent said it is somewhat important and 20 percent said it is very important
    - 35 percent said it is not important.
  - The combined average for statements related to altruism for current group experiences showed that:
    - The importance of altruism in the group increased to 85 percent overall. Of these, 40 percent said it is somewhat important and 45 percent said it is very important.
    - Only 15 percent said it is not important.
  - Between the two statements on altruism, offering support to others was generally considered to be more important than putting other's needs ahead of their own in both the pre-group expectations (70% and 50% respectively) and current group experiences (90% and 80% respectively).
  - Of the two altruistic responses the greatest difference between pre-group expectation and current group experience was related to "put other's needs ahead of mine" (see Table 1).

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3 Rating scale ranged from 'not important', 'somewhat important' and 'very important'.

4 Yalom, I. D., & Leszcz, M. (2005). *The theory and practice of group psychotherapy* (5th ed.). New York: Basic Books.  
Brabender, V. M., Smolar, A. I., Fallon, A. E (2004). *Essentials in Group Therapy*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons. p. 90.



Table 1: Altruism statement: Put others' needs ahead of mine		
Statement	Pre-group expectation	Current group experience
Very Important	10%	30%
Somewhat Important	40%	50%
Not Important	50%	20%

Pre-group expectations showed that 50 percent of the respondents found it either “very important” or “somewhat important” and the other half said it was “not important”. Current group experience shows a decrease (20%) of those who found it not important to put others' needs ahead of theirs; with a total increase of importance to 80 percent. Some of the possible reasons for these changes might include:

- A shift in respondents' expectation on how the group will meet the needs of its members from individual needs to collective needs. Initially, some family members may have expected that the group focus on individual needs. Families who attend the groups often have similar experiences, issues or problems and therefore have shared or mutual needs. Therefore individual needs may be directly or indirectly met through group discussion.
- As relationships and connections develop, group members may be more inclined to put others' needs ahead of their own.

## Comment

These combined averages may indicate that as group members increasingly felt greater belonging to the group and connection with other members, they recognised how their participation and contribution in the group helps others. This may have encouraged some group members to place greater value in altruistic acts. As one respondent commented:

*“Initially I thought the meetings would be beneficial to me alone. However I have learnt that through interacting with the facilitators and others who understand ‘missing’, I am able to contribute to the group and offer support to others – which is extremely satisfying”.*

Another respondent stated that what he found most useful about the group was:

*“The opportunity to support others provides a meaningful reason to attend.”*

These two statements indicate that offering support to others and putting others' needs ahead of their own, can lead to feeling good about oneself.

## Group cohesion

Group cohesion is one of the important factors in a support group as it is the capacity for group members to cohesively work towards a goal or meet the needs of its members and how members relate to the group as a whole. A cohesive group is characterised by “warmth and comfort in the group and a sense of belongingness; they value the group and feel in turn that they are valued, accepted, and supported by other members<sup>5</sup>.”

5 Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, p 55.

The three statements on group cohesion are:

- a) feel less isolated;
  - b) belong to a group who understands and can relate to my experience; and
  - c) to connect with others during the meeting and in between meetings.
- In general, group cohesion was seen to be important. The combined average of the statements was 83 percent for pre-group expectations and 94 percent for current group experiences.
  - Comparing the pre-group expectations and current group experience, statements for a) and b) showed little or no difference in the percentage of respondents who found these to be important. This indicates that group members' expectations were met in terms of: decreased feelings of isolation, and a sense of belonging and mutual understanding from other group members and the facilitators.
  - Group members generally had an expectation that 'connecting with others during and between meetings' (statement c) to be important. However, there was a shift for the respondents who indicated in their pre-group expectation that this aspect is 'not important' as they later indicated in their current group experience, that group cohesion is 'somewhat important' (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Group cohesion statement: Connect with others during the meeting and in between meetings**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Pre-group expectation</i>	<i>Current group experience</i>
Very Important	60%	64%
Somewhat Important	20%	36%
Not Important	20%	0%

This may indicate that family members value the relationships and connections they make with other group members. As one respondent indicated a sense of ownership and belonging to the group:

*"They are professional, supportive individuals who encourage but still allow us to feel ownership of our group..."*

Two other respondents indicated how much they valued the group and their interaction with group members:

*"These meetings are a lifeline for me."*

*"Most useful – interaction with other group members suffering loss... helps me dissipate [my] loss."*

Although respondents were not asked whether they maintained contact with other group members outside of the group meetings, it could be said that group members and families are provided with opportunities to assist them to develop and/or maintain these relationships. These opportunities include: FFMPU events and activities such as the Family Forums or FFMPU connecting families with other family members; missing persons' events such as National Missing Persons Week services; or family led initiatives such as the Families and Friends of Missing People Quilt (Group), or individual members initiating contact with others outside the group.

## Universality

Some family members and friends talk about feeling as if they are the only one living with ‘missing’. Universality is experienced when group members learn that they are not alone with their experience. The feeling or knowledge that others experience missing often occurs when group members hear similarities in other group members’ stories.

The statements related to universality are:

- a) To learn that I am not the only one who is experiencing missing; and
- b) To learn that others have similar or the same thoughts, feelings and experiences as me.
- The combined average for statements relating to universality shows that families consider this to be an important aspect of attending the groups. This is consistent with their expectation prior to attending a group and their current group experience.
- The percentage of respondents who considered universality to be ‘very important’ from their pre-group expectation to current group experience showed an increase from 35 percent to 64 percent respectively (see Table 3).

Table 3: Universality combined average		
Statement	Pre-group expectation	Current group experience
Very Important	35%	64%
Somewhat Important	55%	32%
Not Important	10%	4%

- Statement a) can be seen as an all-encompassing statement that creates a sense of “we’re all in the same boat”. Statement b) can be seen as exploring this experience further by specifically looking at shared thoughts and feelings. In the current group experience, statement b) was marginally more important (100%<sup>6</sup>) compared to statement a) (91%<sup>7</sup>). This slight difference may indicate that to reduce feelings of being alone with one’s experience is not dependent on knowing that others also experience ‘missing’ but it is in knowing that others share the same/ similar thoughts, feelings and experiences. This shared experience creates a sense of mutual understanding between group members. Four respondents highlight this in their responses on what they found most useful about the group:  
*“Sharing feelings, thoughts and emotions with others who can relate to my experience. Resulting in empowerment and confidence to raise awareness about “missing” in the larger community.”*  
*“People who understand and just ‘get it’.”*  
*“Sharing my experiences and listening to others’ stories and experiences... Meeting other people who understand what we are going through.”*  
*“The most helpful thing I find is sharing experiences and feelings of missing with others who share the same or similar situation.”*

6 The total percentage of respondents who said it was either ‘very important’ or ‘somewhat important’

7 As above.

## Imparting information

Imparting information can be a valuable aspect of support groups and can be a source of guidance for group members. Information can come from the facilitators and group members and can be learned implicitly or explicitly.

Statements on imparting information are:

- a) For the facilitators to provide information, advice or suggestions;
  - b) For group members to provide information, advice or suggestions; and
  - c) To learn from group members' experiences of what to expect or what to do.
- The combined average for the statements on imparting information showed an increase in importance for respondents from their pre-group expectations (80%) to their current group experience (94%).
  - Across the pre-group expectations and current group experience, the information, advice and suggestions from facilitators (statement a) was considered to be more important than the information, advice and suggestions from other group members (statement b) or learning from other group members (statement c) (see Table 4). This suggests that respondents strongly feel that there is an ongoing role for facilitators in providing information, advice and suggestions in the groups.

**Table 4: Combined percentage of respondents who said the statement was either very important or somewhat important**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Pre-group expectation</i>	<i>Current group experience</i>
a) For the facilitators to provide information, advice or suggestions	90%	100%
b) For group members to provide information, advice or suggestions, and	70%	90%
c) To learn from group members' experiences of what to expect or what to do.	80%	90%

- By considering the differences between pre-group expectations and current group experience for both statements b) and c), respondents increasingly felt it important for group members to provide input and to learn from other group members. This was highlighted in the previous comments under Universality when a respondent commented:

*"The most helpful thing I find is sharing experiences and feelings of missing with others who share the same or similar situation."*

## Catharsis

Catharsis can be described as the emotional release and relief experienced when a person expresses or shares their problems, thoughts and feelings. For families and friends of missing people, they may find it difficult to share what they are experiencing for a number of reasons; one being that they worry that others may not understand what they are going through.

Statements for catharsis:

- a) To get things off my chest;
  - b) To share my story of missing; and
  - c) To be able to say what is bothering me instead of holding it in.
- The combined average for the statements on catharsis showed a marginal increase in importance from pre-group expectations (67%) to current group experience (72%). This may indicate that this aspect of the support group is not as important or a focus of the group. As one respondent stated, the group gave them “Some unexpected relief from grieving”.
  - The combined average for statements a) and c) showed a slight increase in importance from pre-group expectations to current group experience (see Table 5).

**Table 5: Combined percentage of respondents who said the statement was either very important or somewhat important**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Pre-group expectation</i>	<i>Current group experience</i>
a) Get things off my chest	60%	73%
c) Be able to say what is bothering me instead of holding it in	60%	72%

- There was a slight decrease in the importance of sharing one’s story of missing (see Table 6) from pre-group expectation 80 percent<sup>8</sup> to current group experience 72<sup>9</sup> percent. Though this difference may not be statistically significant, there may be reasons for this difference. One reason being is that sharing ones’ story is still considered to be important. However, it is possible that the purpose of sharing ones’ story and what is shared may have changed. For example, group members may share what has helped them live with missing, which in turn provides support to others. It may be interesting to explore further what group members share, the context in which it occurs and the purpose of sharing, that is, did the group member share an aspect of their story to experience some relief and receive support from others; or did the person share to offer support to another? Another respondent offered:

*“[the group provides] an opportunity for personal reflection on some issues.”*

**Table 6: Catharsis statement: Share my story of missing**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Pre-group expectation</i>	<i>Current group experience</i>
Very Important	30%	36%
Somewhat Important	50%	36%
Not Important	20%	27%

<sup>8</sup> The total percentage of respondents who said it was either ‘very important’ or ‘somewhat important’

<sup>9</sup> As above.

## Instillation of hope

Maintaining hope is an important aspect in groups, as it provides group members with hope for the future for themselves, their family and missing loved one.

Statements for instillation of hope:

- a) To hear what has helped others live with missing; and
- b) To know that the group has helped others with problems like mine encourages me.
- The combined average for statements related to instilling hope shows that families consider this to be an important aspect of attending the groups. This is consistent with their expectation prior to attending a group (90%) and their current group experience (100%). This indicates that respondents felt that this is an important part of the group.
- Within these combined averages, there was an increase in the number of respondents who found this to be very important from 35 percent prior to attending to 64 percent after attending (see Table 3); reflecting that, families found this aspect of the group to be increasingly very important. As one respondent stated:

*“Most useful [thing about the group] – interaction with other group members suffering loss. [It] helps me dissipate loss.”*

Table 7: Instillation of hope combined average

Statement	Pre-group expectation	Current group experience
Very Important	35%	64%
Somewhat Important	55%	32%
Not Important	10%	4%

- There was a shift in those who found statement a) to be very important from pre-group expectation to current group experience (see Table 8) as there was a decrease in the number of respondents who considered this to be ‘very important’. This may be due to a number of factors:
  - The nature of ‘missing’ and the unresolved loss often experienced by families means that their experience is ongoing and may only be resolved when their loved one is found.
  - How a person manages or what they find helpful differs, therefore how family members cope is wide-ranging and varied.
  - Some group members’ and families’ circumstances may be different to the extent that they may experience additional or different pressures and stress that compound their experience of ‘missing’.

One respondent commented that the group has not only provided an opportunity to share feelings and maintain a sense of hope, it has also empowered the respondent into action:

*“Sharing feelings, thoughts and emotions with others who can relate to my experience. Resulting in empowerment and confidence to raise awareness about “missing” in the larger community.”*

**Table 8: Instillation of hope statement a): Hear what has helped others live with missing**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Pre-group expectation</i>	<i>Current group experience</i>
Very Important	70%	55%
Somewhat Important	20%	45%
Not Important	10%	0%

## Facilitation

The groups are facilitated by two FFMPU staff, who have experience and training in facilitating groups. Family members were asked to provide feedback on the facilitation of the groups by rating 12 statements on facilitation. There was also an opportunity for family members to provide written feedback and expand on their answers to the statements.

The 12 statements on facilitation looked at the facilitators' organisation and planning skills and leadership skills<sup>10</sup>. The rating scale ranged from always, often, sometimes, rarely and never. Of the 12 family members who provided feedback, 11 rated these statements.

The feedback on these statements showed:

- Family members who attend the groups generally felt it was always or often the case that: the facilitators came prepared for the groups; the meetings have a clear purpose and that meetings run on time.
  - Facilitators are prepared for the groups; with 82 percent of the family members stating this was 'always' the case and 18 percent said this occurred 'often'.
  - The meetings have a clear purpose; with 64 percent saying that this is 'always' the case, 27 percent said this occurred 'often' and nine percent said this occurred only some of the time.
  - In general, the groups run on time with 45 percent saying this was all of the time and 45 percent saying this was 'often' the case, with nine percent saying this occurred 'sometimes'.
- Facilitators rated highly as 'always' maintaining the safety and confidentiality within the group. As one respondent commented "they are very respectful and confidentiality is important to them".
  - All respondents (100%) rated the facilitators as 'always' ensuring that the group is a safe place to share.
  - A majority of the respondents (91%) said that the facilitators 'always' address issues of confidentiality, while nine percent said this was only 'sometimes'.
- Facilitators rated highly as 'always' being able to appropriately respond to the group members' need for emotional support and understanding. As one respondent stated "the facilitators are always mindful of each person's fragility".
  - In the area of addressing and responding to group members' reactions to difficult and distressing topics, 82 percent said that facilitators 'always' did this; while nine percent said this was 'often' and nine percent said this occurred 'sometimes'.
  - The majority of respondents (91%) found that facilitators 'always' demonstrated sensitivity to the emotional reactions of group members and nine percent said this was 'sometimes'.

10 G. Corey. 2012. *Theory & Practice of Group Counselling* (8th Ed). Brooks/Cole, Belmont, pp.23-31.



- In facilitating group discussions, 64 percent of respondents said that facilitators were seen to 'always' encourage interactions amongst group members, while 27 percent said this was 'often' the case and nine percent said this was 'sometimes' the case.
- In general, respondents indicated that facilitators do not dominate the group discussion, with 55 percent saying this 'never' occurs and 27 percent said this rarely occurs. This is supported by a respondent's feedback: *"[there is an] emphasis on facilitating the "group" rather than facilitator's agenda."*
- Respondents felt that discussions are well paced, with 45 percent indicating that this is 'always' the case and 36 percent said this is 'often' the case. However, there was nine percent who said that this was sometimes the case and nine percent said this was never the case.
- Respondents felt that facilitators are able facilitate discussions and balance the group members' need to share while ensuring that members have equal 'airtime'. Nearly half (45%) of the respondents stated that this was 'always' the case; another 45 percent felt this was 'often' the case, and nine percent said this was 'sometimes' the case. A respondent stated the following in an acknowledgement of the facilitators' role in balancing group members' needs:  
*"The facilitators have a difficult task in catering for the needs of a wide variety of people dealing with different contexts."*

Another group member considered that the facilitators' strengths include:

*"[being able to] direct the conversation and bringing up topics, thoughts, ideas for discussion".*

- The majority of respondents (91%) indicated that the facilitators are 'always' able to adapt to the changing needs of the group members during meetings, and nine percent indicated that this was only some of the time. Three respondents provided the following comments and feedback that the facilitators' strengths and skills include flexibility, follow-through, knowing when to contribute or guide the group while ensuring that group members maintain ownership of the group.

## **Facilitators' strengths**

Though feedback on facilitators' strengths has been incorporated throughout the section on Facilitation, other feedback is provided below.

- *"Facilitators are always helpful, and will always follow-up on issues not able to [be] dealt with on the day"*
- *"Flexibility in allowing people to have their say and allow discussions to take its course and knowing when to make their own contribution"*
- *"They are professional, supportive individuals who encourage but still allow us to feel ownership of our group. They are flexible, show sensitivity and make us feel safe. They are extraordinary people".*
- *"Empathy, very calming. Informative and helpful. Will help seek answers and information"*



## Suggestions on how facilitators can improve the delivery of the group

In terms of the facilitation of the groups, respondents were asked for suggestions on ways facilitators can improve. Four respondents did not provide any suggestions. Six respondents provided comments that indicated that they were happy with the way facilitators ran the groups and suggested that things remain the same. Their comments were:

- *"Keep doing what you are doing now"*
- *"No suggestions come to mind."*
- *"Nothing – I feel the group I'm in runs perfectly to my way of thinking."*
- *"I think they do a superb job. I hope they can continue as they have started. These meetings are a lifeline for me."*
- *"Nothing. They work tirelessly."*
- *"I think they address the situation very well."*

## Feedback on the delivery of the group meetings and processes

Respondents were asked what they found the least useful about the group or group meetings. Eight respondents did not provide any comment or said "nothing" and two respondents stated:

- *"Nothing – I always come away with something positive."*
- *"All information interesting and helpful even if it doesn't relate directly to me."*

Two other respondents provided the following feedback:

- *"Possibly the repetition that can occur at open forums."*
- *"Uncertainty of timing. Costly parking fees (in Darwin)! Difficulty accessing Darwin to Sydney, time differences. My work roster."(member attended via Skype)*

## Feedback on group topics

Respondents were asked what group topic they found most relevant. The feedback received appeared to be a mixture of topics on: managing the missing person's finances, Coronial matters, grief and loss and group activities such as the quilt. There were nine respondents who provided feedback or commented on what they found to be most relevant:

- *"How to deal with financial affairs of the missing person"*
- *"To talk to each other, and quilt is a great idea and if promoted will be a powerful message to the general community."*
- *"Nothing stands out."*
- *"Guest speaker, Paul McMahon, Deputy State Coroner, very informative; gave me confidence to face my son's inquest."*
- *"Gaining insight through "In the Loop" where young people demonstrated similar responses to our own adult emotions in regard to living with a missing loved one. Also enjoyed the group's participation in the Quilt Project."*
- *"Coroner's role and process."*

- *"All the topics have been relevant but especially the ones where the police or Coroners court experts are there."*
- *"Grief and loss and how other people manage to cope."*
- *"All relevant in a way."*

### **Feedback on topic discussion on ambiguous loss**

Ambiguous loss was discussed as a topic at group meetings. To find out how useful this discussion was, feedback was sought from families. Nine respondents provided feedback.

Five respondents indicated that learning about ambiguous loss influenced how they perceived, understood or managed their loss:

- *"Yes because you tend to tell your innermost thoughts."*
- *"Yes I think so. Acknowledgement that it is acceptable to 'have a chat' with the missing person because they really still are with you psychologically helps me. 'Having a chat' can be both metaphoric as well as physical."*
- *"Yes, it validated our feelings."*
- *"Yes – it has given me a way to explain our situation with people who don't understand what we are going through."*
- *"Yes, understanding the concept helps me see that my loss cannot be other than ambiguous unless our child is found and that it is very difficult/different from losing someone [due] to death."*

Three respondents indicated that they either had prior knowledge about ambiguous loss or that the information did not influence how they understood or managed their loss:

- *"No I was very aware of this concept and the descriptors."*
- *"No."*
- *"I understood it from my research."*

One respondent indicated that they were not present at the meeting when the information was provided:

- *Actually missed out on this – should "catch up" on it.*

### **Feedback on topic discussion on grieving styles**

Grieving "styles" was discussed as a topic at a group meeting. To find out how useful this discussion was, feedback was sought from families. (In seeking this feedback, it is acknowledged that respondents may not have been present at the particular group). Nine respondents provided feedback:

Three respondents indicated that receiving information about the different grieving styles had been useful:

- *"Yes, it is good to know that there are different ways people cope with grief. You are not alone."*
- *"Yes, because listening to others you realise that grieving is quite similar."*
- *"Yes. It has helped me understand why my husband and I deal with our loss differently."*

Two respondents indicated that they either had prior knowledge in this area or

- *"Not really, I think I had a good understanding in this area."*
- *"No."*

Four respondents indicated that they were not at the meeting when this information was provided:

- *"We missed this one/topic."*
- *"I must have missed this part of our meeting. I would like to revise this concept."*
- *"Need to 'catch up' on this too."*
- *"I wasn't at this meeting."*

The feedback indicated that for some it assisted them to understand how they experienced and expressed their grief and how this may differ from one family member to another; and the need to provide this information at groups again as there is a likelihood that group members were not present at the particular meeting.

## **Future group planning**

### **Group meetings: structure and presentation**

Group meetings currently run on a combination of a set topic and free flowing discussion where group members lead the discussion. Facilitators also come prepared with topics for the group to discuss. Where there is a set topic to be covered such as grieving style or ambiguous loss, these have been delivered as a presentation, which is then opened to the group to discuss.

### **How information or topics are discussed at group meetings**

Respondents were asked how they would like group meetings to run. The options were: a set topic, free flowing discussion where group members lead the discussion on a topic of interest or a combination of these two. There were 11 respondents who answered the question with the majority (10) indicating that they would like a combination of the two options and one respondent who indicated their preference for a set topic.

In considering the feedback on group delivery (see section on Suggestions on how facilitators can improve the delivery of the group and Feedback on the Delivery of the Group Meetings and Processes) that an open forum may lead to repetition, the meetings may be improved by having a theme for the group meeting which will guide the discussion, while also allowing for group members to raise other topics or issues that they may want to talk about with the group.

### **Who will facilitate group meetings**

Respondents were also asked to indicate their preference for who presents the information to the group. The options included: group members to share information and resources with other group members, guest speaker and facilitators to provide information or give a presentation. Eight respondents provided their preferences, with equal interest in having the first and second preferences for both options of: group members to share information, and resources and facilitators to give a presentation or information. Therefore this indicates that for the majority of the respondents, they would like to continue to have group members and facilitators sharing information rather than a guest speaker.

## Group topics

Group members were asked to indicate the topics or areas they would like covered at group meetings. The following suggestions list the topics in order of the preference of respondents. This list will guide the facilitators in planning group meeting discussions and topics.

## Suggestions for future group meetings

Three questions asked respondents to provide suggestions on ways to improve group meetings. Four respondents did not provide answers and eight provided suggestions, of which the following themes were identified:

- For the group meetings to remain the same, three respondents commented:  
*"Just keep doing what you are doing now... Please just keep up the good work. Open the forum, then listen and spur on the initial thoughts of the talkers."*  
*"No. We cover new ground every meeting."*  
*"No as I think Liz and the team do an amazing job. Their support and kindness has helped us through an extremely difficult time."*
- To combine the groups or have interaction with the young people's group, 'In the Loop', three respondents commented:  
*"I enjoyed the interactions with other groups and especially the young people."*  
*"Suggestion: I like the idea of the Campbelltown joint meetings."*  
*"I have particularly enjoyed our combined group meetings in Campbelltown and hope they can continue."*
- To receive practical information, one person suggested:  
*"Need more support from FFMPU with obtaining death certificate, other members of the family don't support much... More support and discussion on financial affairs; obtaining death certificate."*
- To have ongoing individual support outside the group, one person suggested:  
*"Support individual needs, listen and talk one to one basis... I feel that there are still so many people out there who cannot fully express their feelings and experiences. FFMPU should continue to call and talk to them, even if sometimes they cannot always attend group meetings."*
- To have access to resources on topics covered and information sharing, two respondents suggested:  
*"Maybe provide a reference list on above topics."*  
*"Important: database improvements – information on progress Australia wide; and guest speakers needed from [Federal and NSW] police to inform members of status of all levels of computer records (databases) and their connection."*
- For an opportunity for group self-advocacy, one person commented:  
*"It has become clearer to me that with the demise of the NSW Missing Persons Committee and the focus on information sharing at the FFMPU – organised forums, there is no avenue available for families to advocate change in, for example, advancement of a national database. Is there an opportunity to remedy that somewhat through the group meeting process?"*

- To change the group meeting time and day, two respondents suggested:  
*"I would be able to attend more group meetings if they were held in the evenings or weekends."*  
*"Make meetings available and accessible for all, throughout every part of Australia. We all pay taxes and have an equal entitlement."*
- To have an opportunity for group outings and projects, one respondent suggested:  
*"Doing physical things for our loved one. Projects: initiating our own "garden of hope"; quilts or similar, such as mosaics. Visit to relevant places, that is, excursions; for example, Missing Persons "Doorway of Hope" at Sutherland Cemetery; Nan Tien Temple, Wollongong."*
- To move towards a self-help group where group members facilitate the group meetings, one respondent suggested:  
*"Have group members take a turn on a voluntary basis to lead group. Facilitator interact when needed and to provide guidance."*

