

Workplace support around pregnancy and baby loss

An evaluation summary of Sands' Bereavement in the Workplace training programme

June 2025

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About Sands and Bereavement in the Workplace

About Sands

Sands is the charity speaking up about pregnancy and baby loss, saving babies' lives and supporting bereaved families. For more than 45 years Sands has worked to transform the culture and narrative across the pregnancy and baby loss landscape. It is Sands' proud history of multidisciplinary collaborations that has driven such change. By listening to parents, professionals and researchers, together, with Sands, they are saving babies' lives and improving maternity safety and bereavement care through research, training and campaigning. By putting parents' voices at the heart of our work, Sands has become the expert and leading provider for accredited training.

The scale of pregnancy loss and baby death is staggering. Currently, every day in the UK, 13 babies die shortly before, during or soon after birth. At least 1 in 6 pregnancies end in miscarriage. Stillbirth and neonatal deaths account for 70% of deaths under the age of 16 in the UK; meanwhile, the economic cost of miscarriage in the UK is estimated at £471 million per year.

What is Bereavement in the Workplace training?

Sands' Bereavement in the Workplace training (BITW) started in 2019. It aims to support bereaved parents who are returning to, or are back, at work, and to help employers build more compassionate and supportive workplaces.

BITW provides training and workplace-focused support. Through the Sands Learning Hub, there is also a BITW eLearning module, a template baby loss policy, and guides for employees who have experienced pregnancy and baby loss, their employers and colleagues.

About this report

Between 2022 and 2025, BITW was part funded by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). Sands commissioned NCVO to conduct an independent evaluation of the DHSC-funded work. This report is a summary of the evaluation.

The evaluation assessed the extent to which Sands expanded the reach and uptake of BITW and achieved intended outcomes for employers. It was based on monitoring data, training feedback survey responses, interviews with employers and Sands staff, and reflections from an evaluation advisory group. There are some limitations to the data, including a potential positive bias in some of the employer interview responses, as participants were self-selected and may have been more likely to be proactive in addressing workplace issues.

While the evaluation primarily focused on small and medium-sized employers (SMEs), aligning with the DHSC's funding objectives, it should be noted that Sands also extends BITW to larger organisations, demonstrating its broader applicability.

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As vice-chair for the Hertfordshire Constabulary Baby Loss Support Network I have been trying to think of ways to better educate our workforce about the impact the loss of a baby or child can have on a person. It is important to me that parents are supported through this loss, know what they're entitled to and aren't left to feel uncomfortable in their workplace.

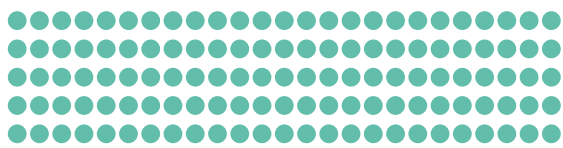
In March 2025 Sands delivered an input to managers and staff across Hertfordshire Constabulary covering a variety of topics around baby loss and entitlements in the workplace. The feedback that I received following this input was amazing and those that attended left feeling more confident in discussing a child / baby loss with their colleagues or employees. It has helped open discussions at all levels of management within our workforce and there will be a regular session throughout the year to give our managers and staff the confidence in supporting colleagues through their loss, however that looks for them.

**PS SIMON TOTTEN, NEIGHBOURHOOD TEAM SERGEANT,
HERTFORDSHIRE CONSTABULARY**

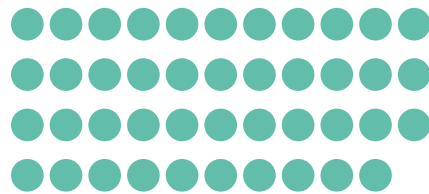


Who has Bereavement in the Workplace reached?

Between 2022 and 2025:



125 SMEs trained



43 large organisations trained

1,573

people trained from SMEs
and large organisations

Trained organisations employ

600,816

staff

As part of the DHSC funding, Sands employed a Workplace Bereavement Support Officer. Between 2024 and 2025, they supported **3,257 women**, including **311 interactions** in which specific support around pregnancy and baby loss at work was requested.

It is difficult to assess the total number of people who accessed BITW resources because mechanisms to track this were not always possible to establish. Since its launch in summer 2024, the Sands Learning Hub has seen a modest start – an expected part of introducing a new system. There is potential for the Hub to significantly increase access to resources in the future.

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When our staff experience pregnancy or baby loss, we've been conscious that we want to support both the individual and the team, who may also be impacted. We focus a lot on mental health, but pregnancy and baby loss was something we discussed less.

I went on BITW training in January 2025. The training was really well delivered, well-paced, it felt tastefully done, and didn't overstep the mark. There were some very useful points about managing returning to work conversations that made me feel more confident. The videos of parents who had experienced loss gave us ideas for helping staff come back to work. We had a stillbirth policy, but following the training we're reviewing the wording and we've moved it out of our 'growing your family' suite of policies.

I think the training has helped us continue on our journey in being a workplace that really cares about our people. Being human means being able to bring your complex things that make you human, and as an employer we need to allow space for sharing sad things like grief and bad experiences too.

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**RAE ELLIS-BARRON, HEAD OF BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT, HUDDERSFIELD
STUDENTS' UNION**

What benefits did employees and organisations experience?

We reviewed 537 training feedback survey responses and interviewed 16 employers.

Overall satisfaction



92% of respondents rated the training as 4 or 5 out of 5, highlighting the informative content, impactful videos featuring bereaved parents and the quality of delivery.



98% would recommend the training to others.

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I think they covered an amazing array of different scenarios and the way it was delivered was so sensitive ... I thought it was a fantastic session.

INTERVIEWEE FROM A MEDIUM-SIZED ORGANISATION

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Attendees also experienced a range of benefits, including:

Having a better understanding of pregnancy and baby loss in the workplace

Evaluation respondents knew more about the prevalence of pregnancy and baby loss, the different types of loss, the statutory entitlements available to those experiencing it and the nature of grief they might experience.

Being more confident to speak about pregnancy and baby loss

In the feedback survey, more than nine in ten SME and large organisation respondents felt confident or very confident in talking about it after the training, compared to around a third of respondents before the training.

Developing HR policies relating to pregnancy and baby loss

Among 13 interviewees who told us about this, five had developed or updated their policies after the training, and another five intended to in the future. Several had used the baby loss policy template which Sands provides.

Having a more prepared and supportive workplace

Respondents felt more prepared to support colleagues affected by pregnancy and baby loss. Several interviewees said the training had opened up conversations about pregnancy and baby loss, including where staff had shared experiences of previous losses with their colleagues.

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In the future, if we were to experience it within the team, I believe people would be more comfortable supporting each other in whichever way is needed.

INTERVIEWEE FROM A SMALL ORGANISATION

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Bereaved parents being better supported in the workplace

Helped by BITW training, interviewees spoke about being led by what their bereaved colleagues wanted and being able to handle situations in which people have experienced loss in a more supportive and informed way.

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We have been led by [our employee] with how much or little she might want to talk about things.

INTERVIEWEE FROM A SMALL ORGANISATION

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Wider benefits, beyond pregnancy and baby loss support

Some interviewees felt BITW training had brought about other important changes in their organisation, including better workplace communication around other types of bereavement and health needs, and a more developed health and wellbeing culture in their workplace.

These findings illustrate the range of ways in which evaluation respondents had, as a result of BITW, become more informed and better able to provide support to employees experiencing pregnancy and baby loss.

What Sands learnt

To support Sands' continued response to the needs of employers and employees, the evaluation identified a range of learning points around awareness raising, appealing to employers, delivery and reach of the training, and how training attendees interacted with the sessions.

Undertaking a range of promotional activities helped Sands to build awareness of BITW.

Work included reaching out to existing supporters, social media campaigns and engagement with business networks. Continuing to pursue a range of activities presents an opportunity to further raise the profile of BITW so that more employers know they can access training and resources to improve their support to bereaved parents.

Employers engaging with BITW may be those already interested in wellbeing issues.

Those signing up were largely motivated by a desire to support their staff, or to know how to support a colleague who has experienced pregnancy or baby loss, often recently. Sands staff identified an opportunity to engage with other employers working proactively on staff wellbeing. Additionally, they recognised the need for a wider culture shift across the corporate sector to ensure that supporting individuals through pregnancy and baby loss is seen as a business imperative.

A free training offer helped SMEs to attend.

Many of our interviewees commented that free provision, enabled through DHSC funding, had been important for them.

Introducing open training sessions helped Sands to exceed targets for numbers involved.

Open sessions were run for attendees from different organisations, thereby enabling more organisations to be trained in a single session.

In NCVO's experience of supporting the voluntary sector, BITW achieved a good attendance rate for free training.

Just over two thirds (69%) of people who registered went on to attend sessions.

It was sometimes more challenging to translate employer interest in BITW into training bookings.

Sands staff observed that having more business-to-business sales skills and capacity might enable more conversions to bookings and help Sands reach new employers in the future.

The training had cross-sector appeal.

People from SMEs registering to attend open sessions were most likely to be from the private sector (40%), followed by the non-profit sector (29%) and the public sector (20%). Sands will need to ensure the training continues to meet the needs of different types of employers in the future.

We don't have evidence to draw firm conclusions about the extent to which women at higher risk of pregnancy and baby loss, including women from minority ethnic groups and women living in the most deprived areas, were reached during the funding period.

There are significant and longstanding inequalities in rates of perinatal death as documented within Sands and Tommy's Policy Unit Saving Babies' Lives 2025 progress report. In 2023, the stillbirth rate among Black babies was over double the UK rate among white babies, and the stillbirth rate for Asian babies was over 1.7 times the rate among white babies. The stillbirth rate is particularly high among the most deprived families at 1.7 times the rate of the least deprived group. Sands undertook some targeted work to reach people at higher risk, as well as developing some inclusive and accessible resources within the grant budget.

Attending the training was an emotional experience for some.

Sands worked hard to support attendees, and several remarked on the care shown by the trainer. It is hoped that the BITW eLearning module will help people who might find a live session emotional, and that organisations wanting further support will approach Sands' Bereavement Support Services team for specialist advice.

Some attendees wanted follow-up training or more information on steps that organisations could take afterwards, beyond the range of suggestions provided currently.

They felt this could include guidance on sharing information on pregnancy and baby loss with new staff or opportunities for organisations to share ideas with each other, for example.

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Supporting our employees through miscarriage and baby loss is not just an act of compassion, but a crucial step in fostering a truly caring and understanding workplace. This training was incredibly insightful and offered practical guidance on handling these sensitive issues. By attending, we gained a deeper understanding of the profound impact of grief and bereavement in the workplace, learned how to offer genuine support to our colleagues, and increased our knowledge about employment rights related to these experiences. This session marked a significant step towards creating a more empathetic, open, and supportive environment for everyone.

**SHAUNA SHEILS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
PEOPLE AND CULTURE, MACQUARIE GROUP**

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What's next for Sands?

Sands is committed to continuous development of BITW. The programme supports Sands' core aim to support everyone touched by pregnancy loss or the death of a baby, whether recently or long ago. Below, Vicky Luk, Head of Partnerships & Philanthropy at Sands, describes key areas under consideration.

Sands aspires to be the trusted national leader in workplace training on pregnancy and baby loss, setting the gold standard for compassionate practices. Our goal is that every employer - regardless of size or sector - can access quality, evidence-based training.

To achieve this, we will explore three priorities:

1

Strengthening and expanding reach.

With the launch of the Sands Learning Hub and BITW eLearning module, we have a scalable, digital-first infrastructure. Next is to accelerate uptake through possible outreach and awareness campaigns, including targeting underrepresented sectors. This could involve partnerships with professional networks, corporate bodies, and membership organisations to embed BITW into standard HR and wellbeing practices.

2

Enhancing the training offer and supporting sustained change.

Participants told us they want more guidance on post-training actions. We will continuously review follow-on resources, refresher sessions, and toolkits to support long-term improvements. New legislation, developments in best practice, and evolving understanding in wellbeing at work will be monitored. It is also important to recognise organisations that demonstrate leadership in workplace support and who can inspire others to adopt similar practices.

3

Building capacity and sustainability.

To engage businesses, we are considering investments in internal business development capabilities, whilst scaling our impact through a mix of funded and paid-for offers. New funding partnerships could subsidise access for SMEs and for sectors supporting those most at risk of pregnancy and baby loss.

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What I'd say to another organisation considering signing up for the training is 'Do it!' It is so much better to be prepared for when that worst thing happens. ”

INTERVIEWEE FROM A SMALL ORGANISATION



Interested in Bereavement in the Workplace training?

Find out more:

Web: **sands.org.uk/BITW**

Email: **training@sands.org.uk**

Sands is speaking up about pregnancy and baby loss, saving babies' lives and supporting bereaved families. Sands offers many types of support. We have specialist, trauma-informed services, including our telephone helpline, email support, and online group sessions.

Call our Helpline on **0808 164 3332**

Email **helpline@sands.org.uk**

sands.org.uk/support

Our training equips healthcare professionals with the skills and knowledge to deliver compassionate care to parents in their time of need. We also offer courses for counsellors, and those working in the community like police officers and faith leaders.

