

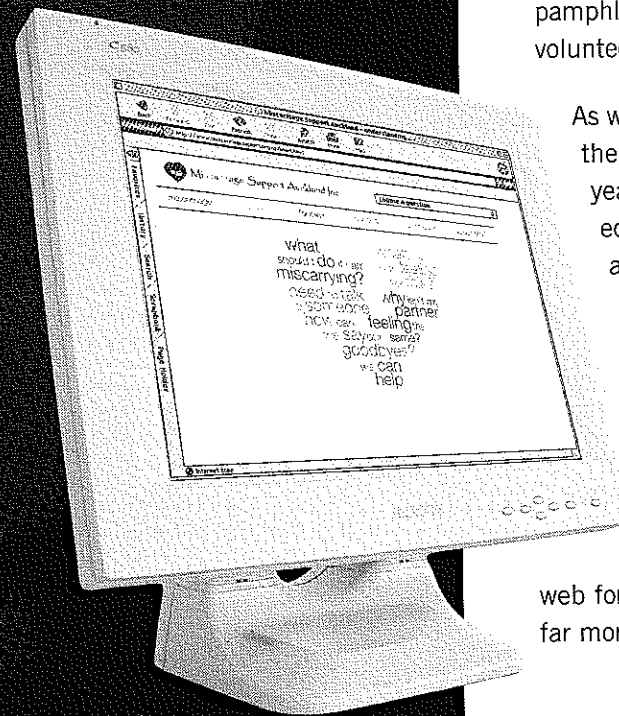
Miscarriage Support Auckland Inc.

Responding to the need for information by people experiencing a common, distressing but little discussed health issue, this group provides web-based information, runs a phone-in helpline and e-mail support service.

The organisation Miscarriage Support Auckland Inc. began in 1985 when Sandra van Eden had a series of miscarriages. Her friend was also distressed by her own experience and they found there were no resources to provide information, support and reassurance. An offer to write a pamphlet turned into a decision to write a book by women for women with simple clear language and using a variety of women's stories. From this came a miscarriage helpline with messages followed up by a trained support person within 24 hours, monthly group meetings, and pamphlets in a wide range of languages. All members are volunteers who have had at least one miscarriage.

As well as providing emotional support and information, the Group, an incorporated society for the last 16 years, promotes community understanding and education about the consequences of miscarriage, and works with health professionals to deliver patient-sensitive services.

The use of IT came from a dream by several of the support workers, which was realised when they were approached by a web design student whose course required her to create a website for a community group. The group knew that young people often go directly to the web for information, and took up the offer. But it proved far more demanding than they expected



Website www.miscarriagesupport.org.nz
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It took 6-8 months to get the site up and running. The web builder understood what was wanted, but being still in training they took a while to work out how to do it. The web map as originally devised tried to accommodate far too much information, but it has now been revised, extended and grown over time. The site is with the Webfarm ISP on their 'free parking' site, and they have now offered Miscarriage Support some statistics facilities. Knowing how many people are using the site and for how long is critical because statistics are important for funding. They already know, however, that the section on recurrent miscarriage is the area showing greatest growth.

Their e-mail support service is also proving demanding. It is not on the website facility but on their own private computers, and these are a bit "old and slow".

Funding comes from the same sources as most community groups. Until five years ago, this was supplemented from sales of Sandra's now out-of-print miscarriage support book. Fundraising continues but financial pressures mean staffing hours have been cut back and the office is based in a private home.

The future

They'd like to be able to provide enough miscarriage support packs for every hospital and medical centre to give the information to every woman treated for miscarriage, and be able to cope with the e-mail and personal follow-up that would arise from that. They'd like help to update and translate the leaflets, especially the Asian-language ones. And they'd like to explore the possibility of a chat room attached to the website. Lots of hopes – and a few promising leads.

What would they do differently?

"We'd educate ourselves about IT and web matters before we started, so we could give the right information and instructions to a web designer."

"We'd think more about the sorts of individuals who might be going to the site, and recognise that children might be looking for information as well as adults."

Useful tips

"Do not approach the web as if you are writing a book."

"If you want a website, try an approach to an education centre for IT students who need to construct a website as part of their training."

"Being clear about what you want from a website is not always easy. We wanted to offer everybody the same services that women in Auckland get."