

**A.J. Desmond & Sons Funeral Directors
Troy, Michigan**

A.J. Desmond & Sons Funeral Directors, Vasu, Rogers & Connell, Troy, MI; A.J. Desmond & Sons Funeral Directors, Price Chapel, Troy, MI

Idea: Provide additional support, information, and tools for those who have experienced the loss of a loved one.

As a follow-up opportunity to our five-week introductory Take Time to Heal Grief Support Group Series, we have begun to offer a series of focused book studies using works from notable grief experts and authors. These four- or five-week, one-and-a-half-hour study sessions are prepared and facilitated in person by Director of Bereavement Services, Clinical Social Worker Linda Dzbanski LLMSW.

After working through the various bereavement seminars with several parents who had lost a child, typically the five week Take Time to Heal series, it became apparent that some were wanting to continue with something. We just did not know what the something was. There were some parents who wanted more but struggled to commit to a monthly support group. A few wanted a different kind of meeting structure. Others wanted a beginning and an end; an on-going support group was not appealing. Meanwhile, I was recommending to several of the parents that they might find, "Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief," by David Kessler helpful. From these threads, the idea of a book study group evolved. The initial interest from this group of parents was high.

At the same time, other recommendations I had been frequently making to participants of Take Time to Heal Series and the On-Going Support Group were "Understanding Your Grief" Second Edition by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. and the accompanying journal, "The Understanding Your Grief Journal" also by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. After beginning to organize the first book study, we started planning a second book study around these two books.

The Grief Group Book Study requires the participants to purchase their own copies of the featured book. Otherwise, there is no fee to attend the professionally led study group. Participants are assigned a section of the book each week. Dividing the book into smaller sections enables everyone to keep up, to dive deep and to participate. With the Wolfelt books, participants were also asked to journal. Each week we begin where we left off, but we also keep a pace to cover the entire book. The goal is to focus, explore and discuss various highlights from each chapter of the book and to takeaway some tools to use on our grief journeys.

Many of those attending our workshops are in early grief stages. By offering additional support and resources such as these book studies, we continue to companion with those who have experienced a significant loss and are working on some sort of grief journey. These book studies offer guidance and support as they further explore feelings of grief and loss and how those feelings transform into active mourning and on to healing.

To recruit for the book study groups, we verbally invited Take Time to Heal participants and Support Group participants, sent out flyers to recent Take Time to Heal participants, posted on our Facebook page and website and made a few phone calls. For the first study group, we limited it to parents who have lost a child. The second group was open to anyone who had lost a loved one recently.

The sessions take place in one of our chapels, a cozy and comfortable setting for twelve to fifteen participants. Because all participants have completed the Take Time to Heal series, and sometimes have participated in other bereavement activities, there is a familiarity with the space, and the facilitator and they share a language around grief and bereavement. Each of the two groups has included participants from different Take Time to Heal and the On-going Support groups, so there is both a familiar and refreshing start to each group. The first Grief Group Book Study met on five consecutive Thursday evenings and the second group met on four consecutive Tuesday evenings.

The Grief Group Book Study program extends the bereavement groups, graduating into a different kind of support group. Participants have found it beneficial, both individually and communally as they accompany and support others on their journeys. We have had twelve and fifteen participants in the two groups.

The Grief Group Book Study gives positive exposure to our community and purposeful additional care to our clients and community members. Our staff can be confident that after they have served a client with care and that the care continues with more support from the A.J. Desmond & Son professional staff. The services offered are comprehensive and full circle. From the care extended for their loved one when first taken into our care to support and care of the bereaved as they heal from their loss.

We have scheduled the next book study group for November in the afternoon and we will repeat the "Understanding Your Grief," and "The Understanding Your Grief Journal," by Alan Wolfelt, PhD. We look forward to more.

Alderson-Ford Funeral Homes, Inc.
Cheshire, Connecticut

Alderson-Ford Funeral Homes, Inc., Naugatuck, CT; Alderson-Ford Funeral Homes, Inc., Waterbury, CT

The Alderson-Ford Funeral Homes, Inc. initially began a bereavement support group for all ages in the Spring of 2022. A Pathway Through Grief is an eight-week program for those who have lost a loved one or dear friend. This program affords one the opportunity to share and discuss those issues that are of the greatest concern at this time. It is intended to help one understand their emotions and problems; receive support and comfort from those who have shared the same experience, and how to cope within the norms of society. Through the journey together, one will discover that life can be satisfying, rewarding and full of joy.

During 2023, the program has since expanded and it is intended for those who have had a recent or previous loss and are having difficulty coping. It is facilitated by a Certified Grief Counselor from the Academy of Grief Counseling, Robert "Bob" Havens, MSHS, GC-C and a new, second Certified Grief Counselor, Catherine Szerszen. The funeral home offers the bereavement support group at no charge to the participants who meet at a Cheshire Senior Center, Cheshire, CT. The ideal range of participants has been from 8-12 attending per session.

Due to the success of our morning session support group within the community, the group has seen an expansion with an additional session offered in the afternoon at the Cheshire Senior Center. Counselor Havens, as facilitator, personally speaks to and registers a minimum of participants and he makes sure that the group is appropriate for the participant; if it is not, Counselor Havens does recommend to the individual more suitable grief resources and groups. Further success with the grief group was demonstrated by Counselor Havens being invited to provide a special free Christmas/Holiday grief program this past December at one of our local parishes in Cheshire, St. Bridget of Sweden Church.

We came to offer this support group initially last year in 2022, by finding a qualified facilitator/Certified Grief Counselor who could facilitate the program at a time of high stress coming out of the pandemic, and have since continued the group. Phone calls were made to the venue (senior center) to ask if they had an appropriate room that could hold about ten people, and the facilitator followed up on securing the location and the program dates/times. Staff member and funeral director, Nicole Paquette, was appointed to assist the facilitator/Certified Grief Counselor. An updated newspaper advertisement is created and placed in the local newspaper (Cheshire Herald) and published twice (two weeks prior to the first new session). Other advertisements were placed on the funeral home's website and Facebook page, local senior center(s), and in their calendar of events. The advertisement provided information about the grief-support group and provided instructions on how to RSVP for the program.

Our funeral home is under the understanding that other local funeral homes are not offering such involved grief support programs to the community. We are choosing a more progressive role in the field of aftercare, and for our time, and relatively little expense, we have witnessed the benefits to others as demonstrated by the increase in demand for the new session and holiday program.

**Arlington Memorial Chapels and Crematory
Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines**

You Were Loved: An Original Song Written for Arlington And Its Client Families

In commemoration of the company's 41st year of serving families, Arlington Memorial Chapels recently launched its original song "You Were Loved". With music, lyrics and orchestration by award-winning composer and musical director Ejay Yatco, the original song was crafted with the help of bereaved family members whose words and personal stories served as inspiration.

The songwriting project—initially presented under the working title Legato—was launched last May in time for Mental Health Awareness Month as part of Arlington's aftercare initiatives for its client-families. The monthlong campaign began with bereaved families submitting personal stories of loss through a digital form and QR code which was shared through our physical office and through our social media platforms. Families could easily access, accomplish and submit the form within minutes—making it convenient for grieving families to participate in the project, to share their stories, and to be one with all those in grief.

In launching the songwriting project, our hope was to provide bereaved families with a safe space and collective outlet for their grief stories—to assist them in navigating loss—through the power of words and music. Dozens of families participated in the project and submitted personal stories of love and loss. The online form included 5 simple questions or prompts which were carefully crafted and inspired by the six needs of mourning developed by Dr. Alan Wolfelt. These questions were designed to assist the bereaved families in their grief journey: in acknowledging the death; embracing the reality of the loss; remembering their loved one; discovering a new self-identity; searching for meaning; and in receiving support from others.

Upon the submission of all the forms, our lyricist and composer Ejay Yatco took inspiration from the words and unique grief stories of the participants in creating the song. The music itself and the orchestration he created was inspired by the collective tone and shared experience of love, loss and grief.

Through the years, the Arlington family has come to realize that bereaved families often do not have the time, energy or emotional bandwidth to prepare memorial tributes for their loved ones, let alone express their grief in helpful and healing ways. Thus, we thought of a project that could potentially answer all these needs: to provide families with an outlet for their grief; to bring bereaved families together through an aftercare project; to provide the same families with a musical composition in loving memory of their loved ones; and to provide them with tools for creating memorial tributes on-the-go.

The original song, "You Were Loved" was officially launched last June 27, 2023 during Arlington's 41st Anniversary held at the Arlington property. Alongside its public launch on Spotify last July 12, the song was also launched on Facebook, Instagram and Tiktok. A shorter, spliced version of the song has made available on Instagram and Tiktok as an original sound or filter that users can easily use for their reels and videos.

By sharing the original composition online, our hope is to make things easier for grieving families—particularly those on-the-go—and provide them with digital tools in creating video tributes for their loved ones even while they're busy or in transit. By uploading the song on various social media platforms, we hope to be able to reach more families all over the world, and to share its powerful message that one is never alone in their grief, and that even in grief, love transcends all.

As the Arlington family celebrates another year of serving families, one thing remains clear: for as long as there are bereaved families to serve and for as long as there are lives to honor, Arlington's work and mission will continue.

**Bradbury Memorial Center
Lake Havasu City, Arizona**

Pet Grief Program

The community we serve is a large pet friendly community. It is known as a casual retirement and vacation area. Much of the time when doing in home death calls, dogs and cats are present. These pets can appear confused or are physically upset at the dynamics of the death of their owners.

Death calls at facilities when a pet owner is taken to the hospital and does not return home, may confuse a pet and they at times spend days waiting at the door or window for the return of their human. We encourage families to bring the pet to the ID viewing to help with the anxiety it may be feeling.

When doing a death call in the home, upon first arriving at a house and are greeted by a pet, we ask their name, take note of the size of pet and let those in the home know the pets are welcome to stay during the removal. This gives the person some control in the situation by making this decision. After placing the deceased on the cot and prior to removing the individual from the home, we leave the face uncovered for a final good-bye for loved ones and if needed, lower the cot for animals to say good-bye.

When returning to the funeral home, the staff makes a note on the file of the type of and name of the pet. That way the staff can refer to the pet by name when talking with the family. This has been well received as funeral home staff are engaging in extra attention and care of the grieving.

When arrangements are made with the family, a gift bag is given to the family for each pet. The gift bag has a name tag with the pet's name written on it. The gifts inside are appropriate for the size and type of dog or cat. Each bag will contain a treat, two toys and a grooming brush. If a family has multiple dogs for example, one bag may contain a leash bag carrier instead of a brush or additional toy so that a variety of items are available to the pets. Each treat bag has the brand and dietary information. On the gift bag is a label that states: Pets grieve too and give tips to help ease anxiety and grief.

The items for the treat bag are not expensive and are purchased at discount stores. Each bag costs approximately \$5.50 and is built into the cost of the overhead.

This program has been well received by the individuals and families we serve.

1. Many pets are considered an important member of pet owner's families.
2. Including a pet in the grief process has been a service many individuals did not know was available.
3. It sets our funeral home apart from others.
4. Our program is noticed by hospices, social workers, and families we serve.

**David C. Brown Funeral Home
Belleville, MI**

Our pets are more than creatures and companions; they are family members. We certainly grieve their deaths. This loss can be stigmatized or misunderstood. Sometimes, due to their constant companionship, we actually grieve longer and deeper when our pets die. A time and place are needed for this in our community; a meeting place where tears and support can be shared. Anyone who has suffered this loss will be welcomed.

There are many reasons a person can grieve the loss of a pet. Often they feel like no one cares. When someone is overwhelmed about the loss they feel, they can't go talk openly about their loss, because they cannot find a place to do so. Upon realizing this need, Jacqueline J. Dalzell, Licensed Funeral Director, CCO, GC-C, and Celebrant, found no support groups for Pet Loss in the area, or even anywhere in the lower part of the State of Michigan. Nobody should suffer in silence at the loss of their animal companion. Therefore, Jacqueline J. Dalzell, Licensed Funeral Director, CCO, GC-C, and Celebrant, has begun a group in our community that addresses this need. This is a passion of Jacqueline's, and she hopes to help many people in the community through this service. The Pet Loss Support Group began on April 3, 2023. It began initially as a six-week course for those in our community who are experiencing the loss of an animal companion. The group meets from 5:30 until 7pm. The location is our aftercare building, the Brown Family Center, located at 678 E. Huron River Drive, Belleville, MI, 48111. The building has a large conference room where the group meets. Coffee and bottled water are provided.

The group follows an agenda. The agenda is changed due to the discussion topics, every six weeks. Some members may continue to attend the group longer, and new topics can be introduced. The group is currently on its second round of six-week intervals. See the agendas below for each interval so far.

**Pet Loss Support Group Agenda
Kick Off Session April 3, 2023**

Week 1 -Tell Your Story

Each participant can talk (if they decide to) about the loss or losses that have brought them to this group.

Week 2 -Grief Work

Discussing the stage of grief and where the participant is currently in the stages. Denial-Anger-Bargaining-Depression-Acceptance

Week 3- Case Scenarios and Discussion

Discussing some case scenarios, as a group, and discussing the many ways one can grieve and move through the loss but still hold the loss in their heart.

Week 4- Ways to Memorialize your Pet

Discussion on ways to grieve, hold a gathering, and other ideas

Week 5-Feelings and Emotions

The IMPORTANCE of self-care while grieving. Grief feelings and "Am I okay?"

Week 6-Wrap- Up: "Has your Stage Changed?"

This week participants talk about this concept and where they are.

**Pet Loss Support Group Agenda
Starting Week of June 5, 2023**

Week 1 -Tell Your Story

Each participant can talk (if they decide to) about the loss or losses that have brought them to this group.

Week 2 -Grief Work

Discussing the stage of grief and where the participant is currently. What is hurting or helping the most?
Denial-Anger-Bargaining-Depression-Acceptance

Week 3- Euthanasia

Discussing some case scenarios, as a group, and discussing the many ways one can handle the decision of euthanasia.

Week 4- Ideas on Final Disposition

Discussion on how to keep your pet or bury your pet's remains.

Week 5-Feelings

What is the emotion you are feeling most recently relating to the loss of your animal companion?

Week 6-Wrap-Up: "Where do we go from here?"

This week participants talk about:

New Pets

Other Aging Pets

Ideas for continued Remembrance

Other ideas on any pet topic are welcome

The group has been advertised at several local veterinary clinics as well as groomers in the area. In addition, it has been advertised at the local senior center and public library also, to reach out deeper into the community. The meeting is now held on the first and third Mondays of each month. There is only one meeting planned in November, and the group does not meet at all in December.

Jacqueline Dalzell, Licensed Funeral Director, CCO, GC-C, and Celebrant, has been passionate about pets, and understands that the grief of their loss can be hard to convey to others. Maybe a family member is not open to talking about it or has never had a pet, and does not understand the emotions that are experienced with the loss. In fact, a person who means well might say, "Get another dog or cat." This is a statement in which the person means well, but it hurts and saddens the recipient. There is no animal that can replace another. In the group, these feelings and comments are discussed, and the person can get feedback while expressing their current feelings about their loss and comments and situations that may arise.

The idea of euthanasia is discussed in each six-week course agenda. Many times, the pet owner may not understand their choices or what to expect. A discussion on the choice of euthanasia is encouraged, plus how to talk to children about this process. Case scenarios are read and discussed.

This group will be running in our community for many years to come. There is a constant need for a group, which Jacqueline is well aware takes years to establish. It will continue to flourish as the community and local pet places begin to suggest and recommend this group.

In addition, this can be a hard time for the family members as they try to memorialize the pet. The group can also help with referrals to pet cremation companies and local pet cemeteries. Jacqueline is able to help with finding and ordering pet urns and pet memorials. The Pet Loss Support Group is here to help, and Jacqueline can be available to meet with a family at the Brown Family Center to present this information if needed.

The benefit for the community of the Pet Loss Support Group is three-fold. It is free to anyone who is in need, regardless of when the loss occurred. It is centrally localized in Belleville in an easily accessible conference room. Furthermore, it is one of the very few programs offered in the State of Michigan. If you look, you will not find any other group where you can meet in-person, and discuss the loss of your animal companion. There are lots of booklets, poems, and other materials that you can purchase, or even given by the cremation society; however, there are few, if any, groups that offer in-person support.

In fact, we are just now becoming a society in which pet loss is beginning to be understood. Just a short decade ago, finding anything to comfort someone during the loss of an animal companion was not an

easy task. Now, we have pet stores such as Petco that offer pet memorial stones, and cards, for pet loss. We have come a long way in society but still lack the option of a group meeting about Pet Loss. The in-person meetings, on an ongoing basis, cannot be underrated. This benefits our staff at the David C. Brown Funeral Home because it demonstrates to the community how our care and concern extends to the animal companions of our community.

Funeraria San Vicente, S.A.
Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia

Christmas Support Meeting: A Tribute to Memory

"Allow yourself to feel whatever you feel; none of it is definitive, the pain will ease and give way to memory, to a different and eternal presence. And the eternal, fortunately, is not what lasts forever, but what is remembered for a lifetime."

Grief Counselling Center, San Vicente Funeral Home

Rationale behind the idea:

Christmas is an important time. In most contexts it is synonymous with happiness, sharing family time, and celebrating and exchanging gifts. However, when you are facing the loss of a loved one you experience deep sorrow. In Colombian culture, the festivities begin when stores start selling Christmas decorations, which continues until mid-January when the traditional lights and decorations are taken down.

The Feast of the Annunciation, or candles day as it is popularly known, is December 7. Families usually get together and light candles in honor of the Virgin Mary, share food and turn on the Christmas lights. Then there are the "novenas de aguinaldos" in which for nine days families go to different houses to gather around representations of the stable where the baby Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem. During this time prayers are said, carols are sung, and traditional food is shared. The novenas culminate on December 24, Christmas Eve, when in most homes gifts are exchanged and a special meal is shared. For Catholics, this is a time to focus on family unity.

Lastly, there is the New Year's Eve celebration, where people dress up in new clothes, have dinner together and gather until the early hours of January 1st to start the year as a family and in conditions that they hope will be repeated in the coming year: with "health and prosperity". When the clock strikes midnight, people embrace and wish each other "Happy New Year" while local radio stations play seasonal music.

During these dates families get together, regardless of where they live, and it is common to see lots of traffic on the roads and congested transport terminals and airports. This is a time of year in which the absence of a deceased loved one is especially noticeable. In the Colombian context it is a season of joy, gratitude and celebration. However, for those who are going through a mourning process it is of course difficult to share these emotions.

In light of this, the Grief Counselling Center at the San Vicente Funeral Home evaluated the relevance of offering mourners and their families a support service that would provide them with information and tools to help them in their grieving process. Thus, in December 2010 the first Christmas meeting was held with an attendance of approximately 80 people. Each year the number of attendees increased until December 2022 when approximately 500 people used the support service.

Every year, at the end of November, our users look forward to the next Christmas support meeting, which has established itself as one of the flagship programs of the San Vicente Funeral Home and its Grief Counselling Center.

Detailed description of the program, service or activity.

The Christmas Meeting is an activity that San Vicente Funeral Home has been carrying out since 2010 for all users of the Grief Counselling Center and their families, in order to provide support during this especially difficult time of the year. This gathering aims to answer the question: "How to face Christmas in the midst of a grieving process?"

The session takes place on the first Friday in December from 2.00-6.00pm (the team of psychologists is available for logistics from 8:00am) and comprises various activities.

Before the event

Registration of attendees and their families

From early November, registration for the activity is done online or by phone. People are asked to provide their full name, phone number and email address, which will be used later (with the authorization of our users) to confirm their attendance and that of their family members.

Logistics

The team meets three times a year for the planning of the activities corresponding to the Christmas Support Meeting gathering, as the proposed theme changes each year. Some examples from the last five years are:

2018: "We are stories"

Objective of the meeting: to work on an approach to the constructions of biographical stories as a fundamental part of the mourning process.

2019: "Turn on your light"

Goal of the meeting: validation and expression of emotions and the recognition of the support of others in the grieving process.

2020: "This too shall pass"

Meeting goal: to develop the confidence to move forward in times of adversity.

2021: "Meeting again"

After having gone through moments of great loneliness and isolation due to the pandemic and Covid-19, this meeting highlighted the importance of the presence of others in one's life, maintaining contact with people, and the value of community relationships.

2022: "Your memory in me"

Goal of the meeting: to validate that the goal of the grieving process is not to forget the loved one, but to transform the relationship one has with him/her based on memory and emotions.

During the event

The Christmas Support Meeting gathering begins with a few brief words from our manager and founder Luis Fernando Arango Madrid, in which he highlights the importance of this type of activity and the meaning that it has for us as a funeral service to accompany our users during the Christmas season.

A speech by the manager and founder of San Vicente Funeral Home, Luis Fernando Arango Madrid (Christmas Support Meeting, 2021).

Then, Juan Sebastian Acosta, director of the Grief Counselling Center, shares the report of activities carried out during the year and the population benefited. Afterwards, space is given for the different groups of the Grief Counselling Center to make a short presentation that they prepare together with their facilitators, inviting them to reflect on what it is like to face Christmas without their loved ones. These presentations are very emotional and full of meaning since they are based on what each group learned during the year (see annexes: Photobook and Video).

Support group presentations.

Following the presentation of the support groups, a symbolic act is performed with the attendees, this being the main event of the meeting. This ritual act is endowed with the memory and the tools that have been built in the session. Each year different symbolic acts have been carried out: construction of picture frames, decoration of a huge Christmas tree, a ceremony with personalized candles, among others.

In 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic that affected so many people around the world, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended not to lower our guard so that "the holidays do not turn into mourning". For that reason, and recognizing the importance of social support for those who were going through grieving processes, the Christmas Support Meeting meeting was held virtually.

The need for a vaccine was urgent and isolation was already causing emotional problems, hence San Vicente Funeral Home and its Grief Counselling Center considered it essential to continue with their interventions, even if these had to be done virtually. The gifts on that occasion consisted of masks with a special design and the phrase "This too shall pass" printed on them, inviting us to take care of ourselves and those we love without succumbing to despair.

These masks could be collected at the Grief Counselling Center's facilities as they would be used for the symbolic activity that was planned for that day. For those who could not go out due to health reasons or were out of town, the masks were mailed to them.

Masks with a special design and the phrase "This too shall pass"

For 2021 the challenge was to propose a support session that highlighted the value of reuniting with others after so many months of pain, isolation and uncertainty. The gift designed for this session was a bracelet with the name or nickname of attendees' loved ones. This required a lot of organizing as we didn't want anyone to miss out and wanted to personally give the bracelet to each user. For our users, it was a very emotional surprise to be given a reminder that they could take everywhere with the name of their loved one, and to this day they continue to wear their bracelets with much affection and gratitude (see annex: Photobook and Video).

"An invisible red thread connects all those who are destined to meet and, irrespective of time, place and circumstance, eternally binds those who have loved each other. The thread may become frayed or tangled, but it can never be broken. The eternal is not what lasts forever, but that which is remembered for a lifetime."

At the end of the ritual there is a brief recess in which traditional Christmas dishes are offered: "natilla", fried dough balls, and biscuits, among others. Then there is a concert that highlights the importance of music as a therapeutic tool that comforts people in their grieving process. This lasts for an hour or 90 minutes and is what closes the support session.

Traditional Colombian Christmas dishes are shared

Christmas concert, 2021.

Benefits provided to families and/or the wider community.

Grief can be a deeply painful, complex and long-lasting experience. Of the special dates that recall the absence of their loved one, Christmas is the most intense, not only because of its meaning and the fact that it was surely shared with family and friends, but also because of its duration. Everything around reminds us that it is Christmas and that the loved one is not there: the lights, the music, the carols, the food, etc.

During this time, it is likely that "nothing is needed". The house is not decorated, invitations and family activities are avoided, the music is uncomfortable and the main desire is that all this excitement end soon. With the invitation to the Christmas Support Meeting, San Vicente Funeral Home offers an opportunity to relate differently to this season and reflect on what it means to live it without the loved one, validating the emotions of sadness and pain but also questioning the idea that being in mourning means living in a permanent state of despair.

To get mourners to understand that allowing themselves to experience Christmas is not an act of betrayal, disloyalty, disaffection or forgetfulness towards their loved one, but on the contrary, that it is a way of honoring their memory and offering a space that favors the resignification of the season, is a fundamental goal of the Christmas Support Meeting.

In addition, the Christmas gathering is an opportunity to share with people who will not pass judgment on the grieving process, who understand better than anyone what this time means without the loved one, and who provide unconditional support in times of deep sorrow.

On the other hand, through the symbolic act that is performed, and the objects that are used as part of it, the construction of memory is enabled and the beginning of a mourning process is infused with the intention of generating well-being.

Benefits provided to the company and its staff

For several years, as an act of solidarity with the pain of those who had lost their loved ones, San Vicente Funeral Home avoided decorating its facilities and much less carrying out Christmas celebrations. With the creation of the Grief Counselling Center 25 years ago, little by little an awareness was generated that the funeral business did not exclude the living and their festivities.

When the Christmas Support Meeting sessions were held, the whole company was infected with the emotional and meaningful atmosphere of commemorating such an important season when experiencing deep sorrow. We accompanied the activities and raised awareness of the significance of this time, offering a warmer and more humane service.

During the Christmas Support Meeting session, the entire staff of San Vicente Funeral Home are available to address any issues that may arise in relation to it. When it is over they share the satisfaction of having provided a space for emotional support during one of the moments in life when it is most needed.

Funeza Servicios Funerarios (Funeza Periférico)

Mexico City, Mexico

Funeza Zaragoza, Iztalco, Mexico; Funeza La Raza, Gustavo A Madero, Mexico; Funeza Azcapotzalco, Azcapotzalco, Mexico; Funeza Los Reyes, Los Reyes Acaquilpan, Mexico; Funeza Nezahualcoytl, Nezahualcoytl, Mexico

One day at a time, here is a paw to make you feel better.

It's time to wake up, it's a new day in your life, suddenly this feeling comes again, it's a feeling that weighs over your chest, you become aware of your pain and you recognize the sadness that was with you the day before, you try to get out of bed and you notice that today you could do it, now you wonder: How do I feel today, can I overcome their absence, will it hurt forever?. You answer those questions in your mind, and you get up without thinking, hoping it will be a better day. This is only one scenario of millions, that people who are going through one of the worst moments in their life have to go through, the depression that a person goes through after the loss of a loved one is something that we do not want to live but that sooner or later we know we will have to face.

Nowadays acknowledging our emotions should be a priority that we leave aside, according to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) in Mexico, 2 out of 10 people who require emotional counseling from a specialist seek care within 4 to 12 years after manifesting the first symptoms, which represents a challenge in the emotional health at a social level of all Mexicans.

In Funeza we are aware of the feelings that families have to go through in the most delicate moment in life, goodbyes are not easy and even less so when we love so much, that is why we decided to create our EMOTIONAL RECOVERY CENTER (CRE) which aims to provide support through professional counseling in order to achieve balance and emotional recovery, The Center shines with its own light since our specialist and assistant have the support of Onyx, our certified therapy dog, making us the first Funeral Group to have its own thanatological therapy team in Mexico City.

After years of supporting families and offering thanatology sessions in our agencies, we are aware of the value of memories and well-being, each person has their own times and processes, we know that being assisted by a professional when dealing with grief is advisable, we understand that we can learn to live with pain but not in pain, that each day is a new opportunity to be happy and we can write the life story with which we want to be remembered.

Since the opening of our Center and the arrival of Onyx, we have taken on the task of providing information regarding mental health, offering a message of wellness to families through workshops, play therapy and conferences, as well as complying with our professional work by providing support groups and individual therapy sessions for families.

Why should we bring a therapy dog to our team? Besides being one of man's best friends, service dogs, such as rescue, assistance and guide dogs, have transformed lives through their intelligence, skills, support and affection. They have shown us that they have a great capacity to care for human beings, which is why Onyx is a fundamental part of our therapeutic scheme, because its support gives comfort to the patient, relieves stress and anxiety. It has the innate ability to feel the emotional needs of a person and act on them with unconditional love.

We have traveled a road that has filled us with surprises through the good response of those who are getting to know the project and joining its growth, reaching the Senate in the Health Forum, where we presented the benefits of the support of a therapy dog and the relevance of understanding integral health, to doctors and legislators, making an impression on the voices that speak on behalf of our society and those who take care of it.

Look at a dog, how cute, let's play! These are the impressions of the little ones that we had the opportunity to meet during the first mental health day that we started with Onyx and our specialist, where

we went to preschools so that through hugs and play sessions they could get to know our program, we also gave conferences for teenagers to give them the tools to identify their emotions.

The boroughs of Mexico City and their forums have embraced the project, the Training Centers for the Elderly of the Benito Juarez borough in Mexico City have welcomed us to provide a warm hug to our community with more life experience, the media has helped us through news articles to promote our project, in addition to attending to the well-being of our members and their families, with all these efforts so far we have impacted more than 1,000 hearts.

We are sure that we can leave our mark on families by lending them a paw and the attention they deserve, we will continue to pave the way to support those who need us, transforming lives with Onyx and our specialist. We want happiness to be not only an ideal but a reality in our society, we invite you to be part of this story by joining the friends of our Emotional Recovery Center where we honor and celebrate life every day.

Halpin-Bitecola Brookdale Funeral and Cremation Service, LLC Bloomfield, New Jersey

The services are over and the family has gone home. As funeral professionals, the questions all of us have been asked come next. "What do I do now?" "How do I go on after the loss of my spouse?" "How do I cope with the loss of my child?" The family will be receiving advice, but is it what they need? Society is terrible at mental health care and support. Their friends will give them advice they think helps: "They are in a better place." "You are young and can have more kids." "You should be moving on and getting over this by now." Has anyone ever benefited from these interactions?

While having the best of intentions to provide aftercare for some time, we were surprised at how much easier it was than we expected. We were determined to host a group in a safe environment where they could share their stories and experiences with others. We found that there was no program or group available to help them with their grief. The only option in our area was to join an online group that negates the human element and on top of it charges a fee. We wanted to offer something to our families that didn't exist, so we had to create it ourselves. This was the start of Grief Hope NJ. The name of the program came from our desire to instill hope in the hearts and minds of those who are grieving. We wanted them to know that there is always a light of hope that shines even in our darkest moments.

Having the name and concept well thought out, it was time to put our program into action. Starting in September of 2022, two of our staff members completed their certification to be AfterCare Specialists with the International Grief Institute. In conjunction with a former Roman Catholic priest with extensive pastoral experience in dealing with grief and loss, our presenters were established. So, with a program, a team, and the creation of a logo, website, and marketing materials, we were ready to offer our group to the community. Our sessions began in January 2023. Our plan was simple - reach out to everyone in the community regardless if we served their family or not and give them an environment to start healing. No outside influence or obligations. No fees or expectations. Attendees can come to all or any sessions that their time permits.

Grief Hope NJ is a program designed to assist those who are going through a loss and are coping with the aftermath of their grief. The group meets at the beginning of each month for two hours in our funeral home and there is a theme for each meeting. Each session starts with a sharing circle, has a break with refreshments, concluding with a short-structured activity with materials we compiled from the grief institute and other useful healing techniques. Those who attend are made to feel welcome and able to tell their story in a safe and confidential space. They hear how others have had similar experiences and also how their experience may have differed and what they can learn from each other. We hold a candlelight Service of Remembrance at the conclusion of our eight-part series for those that we have lost.

The funeral home and staff benefit from this in that the public gains awareness of who we are and what we can offer to them both before and after a loss. During arrangements, we provide a brochure with our program to the family. When we have families inquiring about preplanning their services or deciding on what funeral home to use, we also explain the program will be available to them. In a way, it shows them we are unique and separates us from what others may offer. We branded the program separately from our funeral home in order to be able to present the sessions locally on behalf of any organization. Our funeral home is the primary sponsor and they are a partner. The benefits to families and the community at large is obvious. The families gain some comfort in knowing that they are not alone, there is a safe place to meet and discuss their struggles and they have access to the tools needed to navigate through their grief journey.

The response to our program has been tremendous. We have received an overwhelming amount of positive feedback on how our program has helped and continues to guide the grieving through their loss. Many community organizations took an interest in what we were doing and asked us for more information. The town that we are located in asked us to offer this program in their regularly scheduled recreation calendar of activities. We were able to meet at a separate location in the town and help with their community health services. We were also able to reach out to the Pastoral Care offices in two of our local hospitals, a local hospice program, and several churches within our surrounding area. All of them

pledged to encourage anyone they served that were grieving or feeling a loss to seek our assistance and become more involved in our group. They were excited that something like this was now available!

We are proud to be the only funeral home in our area to offer this much-needed service to our community and the families that we serve.

Jefferson Memorial Cemetery, Funeral Home, Crematory & Arboretum Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Jefferson Memorial Funeral Home, Inc. was looking for an innovative way to bring back the concept of grief support groups by utilizing our newest Garden of Serenity, a fresh cut flower garden. By using the garden as a space for workshops and activities, we partnered with Moonset & Co. (<https://www.moonsetandco.com/>) which offers practical, emotional, and spiritual support for dying, grief, and loss of all kinds. This new-age support group uses nature, grounding, mindfulness, and education to support those who are grieving and looking for ways to stay connected to the eternal resting place of their loved one. It also offers Jefferson Memorial the opportunity to provide a new service to our families and stay engaged with them after a funeral service or burial has been completed as another step-in aftercare – or active care.

The Serenity through Planting program offers gardening and nature-based activities that can benefit mental and physical wellbeing, especially for those who are grieving to provide guided workshops focused on grief support through gardening and movement.

We promoted the program to families who have utilized Jefferson Memorial and the local community who uses our memorial park daily. All programs take place in our Garden of Serenity or Funeral Home. All skillsets and experience levels are encouraged to join the guided experiences, and each workshop is facilitated by Moonset & Co. with support from our funeral directors and arborist.

Our workshops include:

Planting Seeds of Wellness: Participants will plant seeds and consider what care practices we want to grow in our lives. Using our senses to ground us through the process, participants will be guided through a reflection and mindfulness practice as well as planting activity that supports us to plant seeds of wellness for this next season. Participants will leave with new potted edible herbs and flowers that they can watch grow.

Mindfulness in the Garden: Mindfulness is defined by John Kabat-Zinn, a mindfulness scholar, as paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally. In today's world, mindfulness has been studied a great deal and is shown to have benefits for our physical, mental, and emotional well-being alike. In this session, we will engage in various mindfulness practices together using the beautiful garden space as our backdrop and our classroom. We will try on a few different activities so participants explore the tools that work best for them.

Make Your Own Tea from the Garden: Learn how to make tea from leaves yielded from your very own garden!

Greeting Plants for Grief: Take a walk around the garden and get to know some of the plants that can help us through our grief journey. In this experiential session, we will not only learn the stories of different plants for grief and how they have been used through history, we will also have the chance to get to meet some of them up close and personal in the garden through our touch, smell, and taste, and community discussion.

Creating through Grief: Floating Floral Art: In this workshop, participants will use flowers and other objects found in the garden to create their own temporary art. Inspired by the Buddhist practice of creating mandalas, we will practice arranging a flower design as a form of meditation with nature. At the end of our session, participants will engage in a community discussion around how this process may relate to our grief journey and any lessons we can bring back to our day to day lives.

Community Gardening Days: Tend to the Garden of Serenity every month for some therapeutic maintenance and fellowship with others who are in the grief process.

The program gave our funeral home an opportunity to offer a new, hands-on experience to the families we serve, free of charge, as part of their arrangements. By combining gardening and grief support, we felt that we could provide a benefit to families who are struggling with the death of a loved one in a unique way. The program has brought a new level of engagement to our staff with the families they serve, and also brings them together outside of the funeral home during the monthly workshops to continue engaging with these families for months after a service. This provides us with a deeper and more meaningful relationship with those we are here to serve, and gives us the opportunity to discuss other aspects of what our cemetery and funeral home have to offer, whether that is through our arboretum, or other annual programs like our tree lighting and annual remembrance service. The connections we have made through this new program will continue to grow as the Serenity through Planting program develops, and we hope to expand our ability to reach families through other community organizations and partnerships over the next year.

Our firm partnered specifically with an outside professional at Moonset & Co. who was already providing practical, educational and holistic support “where earth care, death care, and community care meet.” Western PA is still a very traditional market. We felt this approach was radical, even as a funeral home, in a world where death and grief are still stigmatized and so many struggle with expressing and navigating their grief. Traditionally, funeral homes have provided support groups, generally through facilitated dialogue with a third-party professional. We have taken this concept and reinvented it into a hands-on approach that allows families to come together and express their grief, while using nature and gardening to work through the loss of a loved one. Together, we invited the community to discover the benefits of Serenity through Planting as we work through your grief journey together, one seed at a time.

Memorial Parque Das Cerejeiras São Paulo, Brazil

“Vida Verde” Project

The bereavement support offered motivates our purpose to exist as a company and, together with the sustainability principle and natural environmental preservation, completes the set of our main pillars.

We search to work with details of each element of this journey to allow our customers to face this painful moment with the best options available for their experience. This is our greatest pride and main differential: we are always looking for inspiration and focus on identifying potential improvements. We keep our focus and energy on the customer experience and always aim at innovating.

We believe that bereavement support is more than just offering support to the family after the death of a loved one. Our purpose is to guide the family through the whole process of loss: before, during and after.

The support begins with awareness and planning for mourning, goes through the setting of spaces, guidance and reception at the time of loss, ceremonies, tributes and psychological and spiritual care.

The last stage of mourning support is as long as the longing for those who left. The farewell process is very important for mourning and that is why we encourage posthumous tributes through events and the creation of memorials.

Vida Verde – Highlight for the item “Innovation”

Through the “Vida Verde” project (“Green Life” in Portuguese), we invite the visitor to plant a native tree seedling in honor of the deceased loved one. We see the act of planting a new tree, either in the cemetery conservation area or at a place of personal choice, as a way of celebrating memory throughout life and symbolizing its continuity.

“Plant a tree and watch a tribute be born” is one of the slogans that summarize Vida Verde. We provide free of charge (for customers and non-customers) native seedling trees and plaques of homage that can be placed next to the trees to allow the graphic expression of the tribute to the deceased. The memorial is born with the tribute while the natural environment is taken care of, symbolizing the continuity of life.

The development of the Vida Verde project: how it all began

The idea came up during an exchange program to the United States of America, first organized by Sincep Acembra, the Brazilian Association of Cemeteries. During a visit to the headquarters of the Batesville Casket Company, we learned about the Living Memorial Program, a program that carries out the planting of a tree in honor of a loved one.

The reforestation of a large area of the cemetery has always been a fundamental issue in our plans, and we found in this inspiration the ideal formula for a new project, the union of 2 pillars of Cerejeiras: “Bereavement Support” and “Natural Environment Preservation”. Upon returning to Brazil, Vida Verde took shape, and the result can be seen in our space: there are already more than 1,500 tributes in the form of planted trees in the cemetery reforestation area.

We are constantly looking for innovative ways to offer the best service, create posthumous tributes and give a new meaning to mourning, and that is why we consider this project so special. Through Vida Verde we can support the bereaved and make a difference in society while maintaining our commitment to the natural environment.

The name of the project and the connection with the natural environment

Planting a tree is also a way of expressing our confidence in sustainability principles and the preservation of the natural environment. The name “Vida Verde” (“Green Life”) was chosen because it represents the

survival of our ecosystems and materializes, in the form of a tribute, the life of a loved one who has passed away. In addition to being a symbol of life, the tree also represents resistance to time and permanence, reinforcing the sense of eternal love for the honor performed.

To continue with our commitment to reforestation and enrichment of the native forest, the seedlings are selected considering the requalification of biodiversity. We are concerned with providing selected native trees in accordance with the best reforestation practices to create a balanced and permanent forest.

The space chosen for the Vida Verde

Memorial Parque das Cerejeiras is located around the Guarapiranga Reservoir, and it is a rare oasis of environmental conservation in the dense urban landscape of the South Districts of São Paulo city. Vida Verde is strategically located in an area adjacent to the Guarapiranga State Park, in order to create a "greenway" which is easily accessible to all visitors.

The execution of the Vida Verde

Vida Verde was launched in 2011 at the All-Souls' Day event. To achieve the success of this project, several teams are involved in each step. First, the Marketing team prepares promotional materials: printed banners, invitations, digital media for marketing emails and social networks that are approved by the Management team. The distribution of printed material as well as the application of banners throughout the cemetery is carried out by the Ceremony team. The schedule of the planting day is organized by the Administrative team and on the date of the tribute, maintenance and gardening employees offer support and the family can plant the tree and do the first watering.

Upon arriving at Memorial Parque das Cerejeiras, family members receive the seedling, shovels, apron, watering can, and all the equipment needed for the homage ritual through planting. The starting point is the Cerejeiras Seedling Nursery, where seedling trees are constantly being produced.

After choosing the seedling species and with the equipment prepared, the gardening team leads the family to the planting area. The family then becomes the main actor in this tribute, placing the seedling in the "cradle" (previously prepared), covered with fertilizer produced inside Cerejeiras premises and doing the first irrigation. After that, we place a plaque containing the name of the person honored and the date of death. A letter is sent to the family a few days later with more details about the species and location of the tree.

Alternatively, the family can choose to collect the seedling provided by Cerejeiras and plant it at a place of personal choice.

The Vida Verde service is free, and it is offered to customers and non-customers. The identification plaque and the seedling for planting, as well as all equipment are provided, have no cost.

Additionally, some Grief Support Group sessions, a psychological assistance event held at Cerejeiras and led by a professional expert in grievance, are ended with a collective planting. It happens after periodic meetings when the group goes through the ritual of creating a memorial in honor of the loved one.

The benefits of Vida Verde

Grief support

Every expression of honor contributes to the elaboration of mourning. We understand that the symbology of a new life developing, growing and starting its cycle in the same place where the body of the deceased loved one rests is very powerful. There is a relationship between life and death and the cycles of nature. In addition to the sentimental content of the tribute, all those involved also learn a lot from the act of planting. It is a way to introduce natural environmental education and nature preservation in the lives of urban citizens. Many customers visit the tree and follow its development, which is why we made a point of leaving an accessible and well-kept area for visitors.

Raise community awareness.

With the various sustainability actions adopted by Memorial Parque das Cerejeiras, we embrace the purpose of promoting natural environmental education in the community. We wish to disseminate the values of sustainability and preservation of the natural environment, publicize and give visibility to our practices and actions. After all, the effective protection of the natural environment depends on the collective awareness of the importance of each individual action.

The creation of a forest for the preservation of fauna and flora is crucial for the community and for the next generations, and only with care for the natural environment can we guarantee quality of life for the future.

More than a venture: we want to make a difference.

Vida Verde project is a part of the support offered by Cerejeiras to the bereaved. As we have already reported, support begins with awareness and planning for mourning, goes through the setting of spaces, guidance and reception at the time of loss, ceremonies, tributes and psychological and spiritual care.

Vida Verde is a flagship service for Memorial Parque das Cerejeiras. It places our client as the protagonist of the tribute, supports them in their grieving journey, and contributes to the preservation of the natural environment. For us, it is an honor to see the hope of better days for our planet and lighter days in the mourning process for family members.

All team members involved feel very proud of Vida Verde and highlight the importance of offering the moments we witness during the tributes, besides being able to closely monitor the trees growing around the space: a happy wait.

Morada da Paz, Parnamirim, RN, Brazil

Illuminating the Path of Grief: Morada da Paz's Innovative Support Platform

Navigating the challenging journey of grief following the loss of a loved one is often overwhelming, as we rarely prepare for such events or feel comfortable discussing death. In 2022, we at Morada da Paz recognized this poignant need and launched Morada do Cuidado, a specially conceived online digital platform offering expert grief support for all those traversing this difficult path.

With resources curated by psychologists and grief professionals, both our clients and the general public can find content, programs, and tools that provide secure, compassionate guidance. Beyond offering crucial support, we believe it is also important to share stories, experiences, and the challenges others are navigating, to help recognize and validate the common feelings in this journey.

Anyone exploring our platform will find ways to live and redefine their experience of loss with utmost care. We aim to offer understanding perspectives and resources that could help to lighten this currently arduous path. Thus, we designed our first content trail, the Grief Support Program.

A multidisciplinary team, composed of psychologists, audiovisual professionals, marketing, and communication experts, worked diligently to structure this program into 15 comprehensive modules. They include original video series and supportive resources, such as music recommendations, book suggestions, and movies. From program structure, research, topic selection, scripting, to high-resolution video production, everything was meticulously executed by our in-house team.

In a narrative that is clear, simple, and comforting, our psychologists, Mariana Simonetti, Beatriz Mendes, and Simône Lira, broached universal themes concerning grief: continuing to live after loss, the role of spirituality and religion, the importance of social support, and more subjective matters such as rediscovering oneself amidst such profound emotional change.

We also connected with real-life experiences, conducting an interview with Adriana Silva, a grieving Morada da Paz client, and participant of the listening group "Chá da Saudade," another project developed by us. In her interview with psychologist Beatriz Mendes, Adriana shared the challenges faced following the loss of her mother.

In addition to connecting with others through shared experiences, the platform also offers a personalized touch. Acknowledging that grief can sometimes require individual attention, we provide an option for bereaved visitors to reach out to our team of psychologists. Whether in person or virtually, consultations can be scheduled, ensuring that anyone in need of one-on-one support can receive the compassionate care they deserve in their unique journey of grief.

Morada do Cuidado podcast

As part of our commitment to diversify our content channels, we launched the Morada do Cuidado Podcast in 2022. In line with our initiative to address the stigma surrounding suicide, we joined the global September Yellow campaign, aimed at promoting the value of life and encouraging dialogue on suicide prevention, a subject still surrounded by taboo and stigma.

Today, Brazil ranks as the third-largest consumer of podcasts worldwide. Recognizing the growing popularity of this medium, we launched our podcast on platforms like Spotify, Amazon Music, and Morada da Paz's YouTube channel. Our psychologist, Mariana Simonetti, hosts the videocast, each episode spanning 30 minutes.

In our first episode, journalist Marina Lino discusses the topic, "Let's talk about suicide?". Marina, in conversation with Mariana Simonetti, emphasizes the importance of asking for help, breaking the silence, understanding our limitations, seeking support, caring for mental health, and gradually recognizing that life is the best choice.

Our mission at Morada da Paz is to change how people perceive and cope with death. We strive to create projects and actions that assist society, not just families served by our company, to navigate grief in the best possible way, recognizing that death is a part of life.

**Myers Mortuary
Ogden, Utah**

Myers Mortuary, Roy, UT; Myers Mortuary, Layton, UT; Myers Mortuary, Brigham City, UT

In keeping with the long-standing tradition of providing outstanding aftercare for the families we serve, in 2022, Myers Mortuary started a very special program called: The Grief Recovery Method. The objective of this special program is to provide experienced professional support for the individuals and families in our community who face emotional challenges following the death of a loved one. We believe that it is imperative to provide such emotional assistance during the new and difficult chapter that our friends face following the death of a loved one. Desiree Carlin serves as our moderator. Desiree has a master's degree in social work and is a knowledgeable and compassionate professional who facilitates Myers Mortuary's Grief Recovery Program. She is a trained expert who has specialized her focus to help individuals and families cope with the emotional challenges they face following tragic life events, especially grief and loss. Ms. Carlin is certified through the Grief Recovery Institute to render service as a Grief Recovery Specialist.

The Grief Recovery Method is based on a book co-authored by John W. James and Russell Friedman, the founders of the Grief Recovery Institute. It is an action-oriented program designed to assist people in moving beyond the pain of loss, whether it's due to death, divorce, or other losses. It provides a structured activity-filled approach to addressing the emotional aspects of grief and supports individuals in their journey toward healing and finding meaning in life after loss. Myers Mortuary has organized the Grief Recovery Method to be shared in six weekly gatherings. Each week a new focus and direction is discussed, and grievers have the opportunity to actively participate in their own healing and to direct their own emotional recovery.

The first step in the grief recovery process is to make commitments, involving the principles of total honesty (for both partners and those working alone), absolute confidentiality (for partners), and uniqueness and individuality. The participants learn how to identify destructive Short-Term Energy Relievers and Behaviors and how to avoid the pitfalls of STERB actions. In order to emotionally comprehend the tragic loss of a loved one, the group participants draw Loss History Graphs and share it with one another and openly talk about the impact each intense loss had in their lives. However, the most important aspect of each activity is to learn and to find a solution. This is achieved by gaining an awareness that incomplete emotional relationships exist.

The grievers learn to identify recovery communications by practicing with partners and taking actions to communicate them with their support system individuals. As the overreaching goal stands the process of moving beyond the loss and accepting undelivered communications and the pain associated with the incompleteness. On sheets of paper, participants create relationship graphs including impactful events and memories that are shared with one another. More than half of the meeting time is designated to convert the relationship graphs into recovery components.

Learning how to apologize, forgive, and to express significant emotional statements play an important part of grief recovery. Letter writing expressing apologies to individuals that might have been hurt in- or un-intentionally are included in the "homework" preparation for specific meetings. In front of a loyal friend and confidant, and with specific instructions given previously to both listener and reader, the heart-bearing and honest apology letters are read out aloud.

Having taken the action of completing incomplete relationships, the grievers now have a new tool kit for losses, disappointments, and other painful life experiences. Open group discussions are held, and action plans are formulated regarding sensitive and emotionally charged clean-up work after a loss, such as disposing of clothes belonging to the deceased, financial accounts, birthday and anniversary dates and holidays. Before the graduation ceremony, grievers are asked to write a PS Completion letter and read it aloud to a "safe listener." A certificate of graduation is given to each participant at the end of the six-week course.

The Grief Recovery has been presented to assisted living residents at Auberge of North Ogden, senior citizens at Golden Hours Senior Center in Ogden, community members at Weber County Library, Utah State University Extension in Brigham City, church congregations, Enhabit Hospice families and grieving individuals at Myers Mortuary in Ogden, Roy, Layton and Brigham City, Utah. The beforenamed organization have collaborated with Myers Mortuary with advertisement, internal announcements, emails to patrons, and providing a safe space for the attendees.

During the year, we have built long-lasting positive relationships with these organizations in our community and have developed a deep mutual respect. By offering this program, Myers Mortuary is demonstrating our commitment to the well-being of the communities we serve. We believe that by actively engaging in providing support and free resources to help individuals navigate the grief process that we can help them find solace during a challenging time.

**Nie Family Funeral Home & Cremation Services, Inc. – Carpenter Chapel
Ann Arbor, Michigan**

*Nie Family Funeral Home & Cremation Services, Inc. – Liberty Chapel
Ann Arbor, MI*

The Nie Family Funeral Home has been proud to be serving families throughout Michigan for the last 44 years. One of the things we pride ourselves in is our partnership with local hospitals to assist parents who have suffered through a miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant death. Through our partnership we closely work with their social workers to make contact with these families and to offer our services as a complimentary courtesy. Concluding our interactions with any of the families we serve, we always like to follow up with suggestions on how to deal with grief.

There are multiple local organizations that deal with grief, but when it comes to this type of loss what is offered isn't applicable to their situation. These families don't have the memories of a loved one who has lived a long and fulfilling life. These losses are unexpected and simply unfair. The families experiencing this type of loss were recently picking out cribs, and planning other details of their exciting future and then, in an instant, it was taken from them. Society isn't comfortable on how to help these families. The topic is uncomfortable and when it happens the grief has historically been kept behind closed doors. The program we held was an opportunity to open that door.

During the past year, Nie Funeral Home partnered with a local non-profit, Remembering Cherubs, whose goal is to provide support, guidance and education to parents, their supporters, and providers following pregnancy loss. Together, we put on an event called "Wave of Light & Community Game Night." On October 15, 2022, which happens to be National Pregnancy and & Infant Loss Awareness Day, we invited our extended community into our home to have a night of celebrating and honoring the little lives taken much too soon.

The event began with Remembering Cherub's founder, Monica Anderson, welcoming everyone and talking about their non-profits work. We then had a performance called "Behind Closed Doors," which is an educational piece where we had four people sharing their stories of loss. Afterwards, we watched a lyrical dance to the song Even for a Day written by the founder, Monica Anderson.

Next was the Candle Lighting Ceremony. We had LaTresa Wiley, a licensed clinical social worker from Michigan Medicine come and make a speech about honoring the babies all the while the room was slowly filling with candlelight. Once all the candles had been lit, Taylor Jones, a board member for Remembering Cherubs, read the names of the babies the families who joined us provided, so that we could all have a moment of silence in their honor.

We then had Christy Miller, the program director from Grievewell, another local grief-support non-profit organization, come do a decompression session. This included deep breath meditation and visualization.

To conclude the evening, we transitioned to a game night and had everyone move into another one of our chapels where refreshments and light snacks were provided.

When the event was over, emotions were high, but relief and happiness filled our hearts. The Nie Family Funeral Home as well as Remembering Cherubs and the other community members who joined us were able to collaborate to create this successful event. The most beneficial part was being able to create a safe space. These families, who often haven't spoken out loud to their community about their pregnancy loss, are now sitting in a room with what we like to call "their village." We watched people let down their guard and just talk about their experiences and not feel as though their grief was any less than for someone who had lived a full life. Seeing that they aren't alone in this journey, being able to network, and connect with neighbors that can support one another as they move forward was deeply meaningful for all of those who participated.

Wasatch Lawn Memorial Park and Mortuary
Salt Lake City, UT

*Valley View Memorial Park and Funeral Home, West Valley City, UT; Wasatch Lawn Memorial Park
South Valley, Riverton, UT*

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2019, more than 13.6 million Americans were widowed and it is likely that for most of the surviving spouses, the loss marked the beginning of a difficult adjustment period. The death of a spouse is considered by mental health professionals to be the most extreme of all life stressors. It is more stressful than divorce, the death of a parent, major personal injury or illness, or serving jail time. Common issues for widows and widowers may include; loss of social activity, feelings of isolation from others, belief that others do not understand what they are experiencing or reluctance to get involved with new people or organizations.

For the past seven years, the Dignity Memorial Salt Lake Market; Wasatch Lawn Memorial Park and Mortuary, Valley View Funeral Home and Memorial Park and Wasatch Lawn South Valley Memorial Park has participated in the Dignity Memorial LIFT® (Living Information for Today®) program. This social support program helps widows and widowers adjust to the loss of their spouses. The program is not a dating resource, grief support group or grief-counseling program. Instead, giving widowed individuals who become members of our L.I.F.T. ® group the opportunity to socialize with others who share similar feelings and experiences. Membership is not restricted to those who were served by Dignity Memorial service providers; often members will invite friends or relatives who have also experienced the loss of their spouse. Our local L.I.F.T. ® group has offered widowed individuals the opportunity to hear educational information from a variety of speakers and activities. Monthly program activities may include luncheons, theater or movie outings, art lessons, guest lectures, trips, picnics, potluck dinners or museum visits. When planning outings, we are mindful of expenses, mobility issues, and location of venues. There are no membership dues or fees, the only expenses are for personal expenses, such as the cost of meals, event tickets, bus rides, etc.

This encouraging program has more than 80 chapters throughout the country. Dignity Memorial providers began the program in support of widowed persons, who sometimes feel that loved ones do not understand what they are experiencing. Dignity Memorial LIFT provides a safe and upLIFTing environment with others who do understand. In addition to providing support for widowed individuals allowing for a continuum of care for the families we serve, the program also helps build relationships between our locations and widowed persons in our community, which in turn, helps us build positive brand awareness.

Weeks' Funeral Home Buckley, Washington

Weeks' Enumclaw Funeral Home, Enumclaw, WA; Weeks' Dryer Mortuary, Tacoma, WA; and Edline-Yahn & Covington Funeral Chapel, Kent, WA

It began with a desire to provide our funeral directors with an additional tool when serving client families. It progressed rapidly into a community gathering of more than (20) different nonprofit/community groups, - a rousing game of adult "Ring Toss for A Reason" to benefit (18) local schools, -- and it continues to evolve and advance today.

Our idea was to develop and create a Community Resource Guide filled with the names and contact information of local clergy, celebrants, musicians, catering companies, videographers, etc., -- as well as community groups who help families in other areas when/if needed.

Families we serve often turn to us for resources regarding:

- Where to donate wheelchairs or a medical bed no longer needed?
- What organizations take donations of used clothing, furniture, or household items?
- Are there local groups who deliver hot meals or food to newly single senior adults?
- What organizations provide transportation and/or assistance for doctor appointments or grocery store trips?
- Where can families connect with nearby hospice services or grief support for multiple ages of family members?
- What local groups have a need for volunteers, and in what programs?

Our hope for this Community Resource Guide is that it will not only allow us to better serve our families, -- moreover, it will be a valuable resource for our community at large.

Our first action step was to put together a prototype of the Resource Booklet and the idea. Directly thereafter, we began making phone calls and personal visits to talk with and get feedback from the managers of our funeral homes, local community leaders (mayors, police and fire chiefs, grief counselors), directors of nonprofit organizations (foodbanks, clothing banks, senior centers), local church pastors and priests, and staff in two different school districts (Enumclaw & White River School Districts).

To a person, everyone we spoke with loved the idea of a Community Resource Guide, could see the benefit for our community, and offered their support in getting the idea going.

When we were asked, why would a funeral home want to spearhead a project like this, -- we shared with them what every person in the funeral profession knows well:

In funeral service, we serve more people who are living than those who have died. Because for every decedent we care for, there is a family of 1-4 people sitting around our arrangement table looking at us through eyes of shock, sadness, denial, and every other emotion. And most of us make it our mission to care for those people as well.

To kick off our idea and get our Resource Ball rolling, our funeral home offered to host a community luncheon on April 12, 2023. We reserved a good-sized conference room at the local community college (Weeks' Funeral Home Room at Green River Community College), added an upscale complimentary lunch of individually wrapped charcuterie cups, fresh fruits, and hot/cold beverages, -- and then we invited every local community group to join us.

Our flyer-style invitation went out to churches of all faiths, nonprofit/community groups serving all ages/stages and areas, city officials, Chambers of Commerce, and more. We told groups who planned to attend to bring a supply of their brochures/program materials to share with others. (Which they did -- filling two long tables with excellent take away materials.)

For purposes of cross promotion, we asked the three largest and most visible nonprofit organizations in our area to become our partners in hosting this event. (Rainier Foothills Wellness Foundation, Plateau Outreach Ministries, and Enumclaw Senior Center). Those partnerships also helped participants relax in

accepting an invitation from a funeral home and went a long way to help them trust that our gathering was not a death-related affair.

To demonstrate our sincere commitment to the community and in hosting the luncheon, we asked the owners of our funeral homes and top-level managers to attend if possible. (We are pleased to say they did attend).

Our April 12th gathering was well received and attended. Representatives came from local service clubs (Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions), senior centers, historical societies, schools, churches, and a wide range of community groups. For more than two hours, (11am-1pm), our guests went around the room introducing themselves and the mission and services of their group. In addition to our great group discussion, (23) participants from different community groups shared their contact information with us and asked to be included as this idea grows and moves forward.

We believe it's fair to say that our Community Resource Guide idea has "started something". In fact, maybe a few somethings:

- We have raised awareness. The Chamber of Commerce just announced and initiated a campaign to produce two new publications: a Community Business Guide, and a Map of the City. We of course will be a sponsor in both publications.
- We made new friends and so did others. We have heard from several groups who attended our April 12th gathering, that they have since booked each other as guest speakers at their meetings. Members in each group are therefore learning more about one another and ways to work together.
- A community group is forming. There is now discussion about rekindling a community group to meet quarterly to discuss/share upcoming community programs and events.
- We met new pastors with new ministries. Two new pastors of established churches in the area attended our April 12th gathering. These new pastors are eager to share their vision, new ministries, and meet community members.
- Nine public schools in two school districts received Amazon gift cards along with our note letting them know that they were winners in our Weeks' "Ring Toss for a Reason" game.

And true to our original goal, we helped our community see us as the valuable resource we are. Not only when a death has occurred, but every day as a trusted community partner.