

**Arlington Memorial Chapels, Inc., Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines**

## **TIMELESS TASTES: A COOKBOOK OF MEMORIES**

As Filipinos, many of us have cherished memories of sharing beloved home-cooked meals with our loved ones, passing down recipes through generations. These recipes hold a special sentimental value, as they connect us to our heritage and the memories of those who have passed. The unique power of food to evoke cherished memories made it a powerful medium for honoring and remembering our loved ones.

That is why we were thrilled to introduce "Timeless Tastes: A Cookbook of Memories," a collection of recipes from our client families. Whether it was a recipe handed down from a loved one who had passed or a dish a loved one adored, we aimed to keep their memory alive through this compilation.

We invited our clients to share one to two recipes, along with a heartwarming story of their favorite memory with their loved one while preparing or enjoying meals together. Additionally, they had the option to share some cherished photos. If preferred, we kept the entry anonymous.

Reaching out to previous client families for this project was a profoundly moving experience for our employees. It reinforced their vocation and commitment to serve the bereaved, giving them a larger sense of purpose. They listened to stories of love, loss, and legacy, deepening their understanding of the enduring bonds between family members and the significance of their role in honoring these connections.

Many of our employees were inspired to contribute recipes of their own loved ones, allowing them to remember their own grandmothers, fathers, and other cherished family members. Sharing these personal recipes not only enriched the cookbook but also provided a heartfelt way for our staff to honor their own familial connections.

We collected over 30 recipes and planned a social media extension of this project, doing something similar to the short TikToks or Instagram reels of "30 days of \_\_\_ recipes." In this case, it will be 30 reels of trying a different recipe from the cookbook every day for a month.

This project encapsulated the spirit of togetherness and remembrance that food uniquely fosters. Each recipe and story contributed to a tapestry of love, heritage, and memory, allowing us to celebrate the lives of those who had touched our hearts through the meals they cherished. By sharing these recipes and memories, we not only honored our loved ones but also preserved a part of our cultural heritage for future generations.

"Timeless Tastes: A Cookbook of Memories" was more than just a collection of recipes; it was a heartfelt tribute to the enduring connections we maintained with our loved ones through the food we shared. This initiative exemplified how the simple act of cooking and eating together could serve as a powerful reminder of the love and joy that continued to bind us, even after our loved ones had passed. The process of gathering these recipes was nothing short of extraordinary.

Families opened their hearts, sharing intimate stories and treasured recipes and photographs that spoke volumes of their love and loss. Each submission was a testament to the strength of familial bonds and the comfort found in culinary traditions.

We were moved by stories of partners, parents and grandparents who spent hours in the kitchen, teaching their families the secrets of their signature dishes. We read about fathers who, despite their busy schedules, always made time to cook a special meal for their families on weekends. There were tales of siblings coming together to recreate their mother's famous dish, each bite bringing back a flood of memories.

As we compiled these stories and recipes into "Timeless Tastes: A Cookbook of Memories," we realized we were creating something truly special. This was not just a cookbook; it was a repository of love, a celebration of lives well-lived, and a reminder that our loved ones live on in the traditions and memories we hold dear.

The social media extension of this project brought these stories to an even wider audience. Each day, a new recipe video will be shared, complete with the story behind it. These videos will not only showcase the culinary heritage of our clients but also inspire others to share their own stories and recipes. Our hope is that this will allow individuals to view loss and grief in a different light and help those who had lost loved ones find comfort in seeing how others remembered their own.

"Timeless Tastes: A Cookbook of Memories" was more than a project; it was a journey through the heart and soul of our community. It underscored the importance of preserving our culinary traditions and the memories associated with them. Through this initiative, we were reminded that while our loved ones may no longer be with us, their legacy lives on in the meals we share, the stories we tell, and the love we continue to spread.

In the end, "Timeless Tastes" was a resounding success, a poignant reminder of the power of food to connect us to our past, celebrate our present, and inspire our future. It was an honor to be a part of this beautiful tribute, and we look forward to continuing this tradition in the years to come.

## **Arrington Funeral Directors & Crematory, Jackson, TN**

### **Our Door Is Still Open**

For those of us who have personally experienced the death of someone we dearly love, we understand the many emotions experienced in the days, weeks, and months that follow. The first few days were filled with immense sadness, grief and mourning, but also with many tasks that kept us busy - phone calls, making decisions, gathering information, and planning for the service, just to name a few. Then, our friends left the funeral home and returned to their lives; the cards, flowers and food ceased; and we were left trying to adjust to our new normal life.

One of the most crucial takeaways from our own experiences with death and grief, that we have been able to carry over to the families we serve, is the need for continued support and care. Successful funeral homes now understand that funeral and burial services should not be the end of care, instead marking the beginning of care that comes after the service, with an emphasis on care. That continuing need of support from the family is the most important reason funeral homes should offer aftercare services.

A successful aftercare program reaches far beyond the few days of helping families in planning the funeral/memorial service and final disposition. Funeral homes can expand the relationships they have with families while benefiting their mental health. Aside from establishing a much-needed resource for grieving families, funeral aftercare services are a way to grow your business, gain referrals through maintained relationships with those you have served, and meet potential future families, all while providing an invaluable service to your community.

By providing these services during a family's critical time of need, your business will demonstrate commitment to the mental and emotional wellbeing of families. This commitment can help build brand loyalty with the families you serve — and perhaps the larger community. Aftercare programs like grief support groups can help bring people from the community into your funeral home year-round.

Arrington Funeral Directors began to focus on Aftercare the year after opening in 1995. No one was offering grief services in our community at the time. We began by providing grief groups every week in our facility, led by an area counselor, which proved to be successful. After organizing and hosting these support meetings for several years, two churches and a hospice organization began to offer support groups after realizing the growing need in our community. A few years ago, we began to see many third-party Aftercare providers in our profession. We began using one of those providers and soon discovered they were not providing services that met our standards. We have always been committed to personal quality service for each family according to their circumstances. Realizing that every family member has needs that are different and unique, we made the decision last year to design our own Aftercare Services, one family at a time, on a more personal level.

We added an experienced 60-year-old “young at heart” retired minister, Chuck Maxwell, to our staff to serve as our Aftercare Minister and Coordinator, to follow each family and focus only on aftercare. The International Grief Institute offers a certification in Aftercare, so we enlisted Chuck as well as Judy Arrington, a retired registered nurse already certified by other grief organizations, to attend the class to become certified. After completing their certifications, they used research and their combined expertise to design our program, which has grown to be one of the more appreciated and recognized services we offer to our families.

Starting when the family has finalized arrangements, the phone numbers provided by family members are entered into our aftercare text contact system. The funeral director for that family is responsible for making notes about whom to contact, their relationship with the deceased, circumstances of the death, and any other pertinent details needed to personalize care to match the needs of each person.

Two weeks after their loved one's death, each family member receives a letter, including a brochure we designed about our aftercare ministry. Shortly thereafter, they receive our "Playbook of Hope" resource with a personal note from Chuck. This resource was designed by the International Grief Institute and customized for our application — we've also made the book available on our website under Grief Resources. Chuck also includes specific resources from the International Grief Institute's i-care library, related to grief in terms of the relationship to their loved one, whether it is the loss of a spouse, child, parent, etc.

Two months after the death, the next text Chuck sends includes how much we appreciate the opportunity to serve their family, that he is praying for them, and is always available for text communications, personal visits, or phone calls. This has resulted in personal visits, coffee, lunch, or an afternoon visit on the patio to provide support to the family member, even if that simply means needing the company of another person with whom to sit.

Because the responses we receive from this text are thanking us for the care they received, his responding text will ask them for any suggestions on how we can improve our service, since we are dedicated to providing excellent service to all families, and if they would consider a Google review. This was (and still is) an uncomfortable request to make, but something we learned from the third-party aftercare service we began with was that there was an increase in our Google reviews without any hesitation from the families.

Along with helping families, our Aftercare program has resulted in benefits to our own staff as well. Twice a month during our daily staff meetings, Chuck or Judy will share any updates about a family, and share the positive text responses, which has resulted in an encouraging effect on our staff.

Three months after the date of death, each family member receives the next text checking in and inquiring about their grief journey. Again, the responses have shown great appreciation, and they will typically ask questions related to their grief.

The remaining text messages are sent on the birthday of their loved one, the anniversary of the death, and at Christmas, along with Christmas cards we mail to the family. Surprisingly to us, the birthday text message receives the most responses thanking us for remembering their loved one on that day.

If at any time Chuck receives a response or message that alerts him to someone needing professional help, he will connect them to a licensed grief professional in the area. Because of the relationship we have nurtured with that family, as well as Chuck's ongoing communications, we find it has become easier for grieving families to receive the help they need.

In the beginning of our conversations about expanding our aftercare services, we were all hesitant about sending text messages and not phone calls, but we discovered early on that people are more likely to respond via texting in their own time, rather than let a phone call go to voicemail and often not return the call.

A recent story exemplifying our personalized Aftercare: "Ann" lost her husband suddenly. He managed a significant portion of the administrative tasks in their marriage. After his death, Ann asked to talk with Chuck. During their visit, she expressed how "lost" she was in almost every area of her life, especially with routine bills and general upkeep of the home.

Chuck listened to her, encouraging her that she was not lost, but simply needed to take small steps to find her way in navigating through her new normal. He then made a call and set Ann up with an accountant to help with her taxes and other financial needs.

Because of those communications, encouragement, and personalized care, she began attending church and building new relationships. Ann now has a new spark in her eyes, gained confidence, and is making plans to move closer to her family.

Our personalized aftercare program has developed into a well-received referral service that Arrington Funeral Directors provides, which differentiates us from other firms in the area. Because of our program, both Chuck and Judy have been asked to speak in the community at various events and conferences.

We are also the only funeral home in the area to have a Grief Resource Library which is available at any time to our families and the community, with over 100 books and brochures. We categorized them into the types of death and perspectives, which makes it easier for a family/community member to find a resource that speaks to their situation.

Providing an aftercare program is a part of our signature services, not an add-on; it is a part of our ongoing care of those who have entrusted themselves and their loved ones to us. As funeral professionals, we have seen first-hand those individuals with unprocessed grief and the long-term issues they face, both physically and emotionally. It is our responsibility to continue our care for families navigating their grief journey after the service ends, as their new life begins.

"The one thing that makes all the difference in the world is having somebody walk with you in support and understanding. It all starts with the funeral home. We can't ease the suffering or make it stop, but we can be there with aftercare."

Linda Findlay  
Grief Care & Aftercare Specialist  
Founder & Owner, Mourning Discoveries

## Caldwell & Cowan Funeral Home, Covington, GA

In the past year Caldwell & Cowan Funeral Home established Illuminate Community Grief Support Meetup in partnership with Longleaf Hospice. Illuminate is a grief support group that is open to anyone in the community regardless of their affiliations. It is held in the center of town at a neutral location. The group meets on the second Tuesday of each month after work from 5:30 to 7:00PM. The first meetup was held on January 9, 2024.

The group was established in response to a need from the community. Caldwell & Cowan previously held an in-person grief support group but in 2020 it was disbanded due to the Covid-19 regulations that prevented groups from meeting. Longleaf Hospice has been holding online grief support groups twice a month in the middle of the day to serve those that may be retired or able to participate during their lunch break with a great response. It is for these main reasons that the two decided to partner and provide an in-person evening grief support group. Illuminate is a place for participants to share their experiences with grief through open conversation and the assistance of thought-provoking worksheets.

Caldwell & Cowan is partnered with Longleaf Hospice in this endeavor. Longleaf Hospice's Bereavement Coordinator Candyce Patterson provided training to funeral director Christine Banks and allowed her to co-facilitate their online grief support group for months leading up to the establishment of Illuminate. This provided a good basis for Christine to familiarize herself with leading groups and facilitating meaningful discussions. Longleaf Hospice also has provided the physical space for the meetings to be held, as they have an office building in the center of town. A conference room is utilized and transformed into the group's space. Caldwell & Cowan Funeral Home provides the facilitators for this meetup each month, the refreshments, and all media sources for the participants. Media such as posters, handouts, worksheets, pamphlets, and books are available to all participants. Together these two businesses are working together very nicely.

This new group is an opportunity for the funeral home staff to engage with the community outside of the funeral home. It is also a place for them to share their strengths and struggles with their own grief. Christine, who leads the group, is a young widow that has done substantial work with her own grief in the last 10 years since the passing of her husband. Ben Reynolds, co-facilitator of the group, also shares his grief following the recent loss of his mother with attendees to show that no one is immune to the weight of grief and that we can all benefit from sharing.

The residents of Newton County have the opportunity to benefit greatly from the newly established community grief support meetup. It provides a space for them to share about a loved one that has passed away as well as the opportunity to discuss ways to better adapt to their new lives following a loss. A perspective offered by their neighbors and fellows can be incredibly supportive to participants in any situation that they might find themselves. We have created an open and accepting place for any person that may be interested in the area.

Overall, the response to the group has been positive and a few of the participants have attended multiple times. Both the funeral home and hospice are utilizing social media as a means of sharing information about the group. Signs have been posted in various spots around town to let the community know about the group. We have also been able to place flyers at local churches, businesses, and the Newton County Senior Center to spread the word. It is our hope that this group will continue to grow and become well known to the citizens of Newton County.

## Funeraria Jaramillo, Loja, Ecuador

Beyond the Rainbow: Validating childhood grief through theater.

In recent years, our Bereavement Care Unit encountered a profound story that highlighted a critical gap in society's understanding of grief. During a consultation, a woman shared her poignant experience:

"I have lost several family members in recent years. Each loss, though painful, has found peace in my heart over time. However, I struggle with the loss of my baby, whom I lost seven months ago. The pain overwhelms my soul."

The therapist, with empathy, asked, "Dear, what is the name of your baby, your partner?"

She replied, "Tobby. This may sound strange to you, but my little boy, was my dog. I do not want to say he was my pet because he was my son, he gave me that motherly role. When I dared to say it out loud, people told me I was crazy, saying I could not grieve for an animal, that my feelings, that my feelings were sinful, and suggested I simply get another dog."

This narrative underscores a pervasive issue in how society often invalidates grief, especially regarding the loss of a pet. Such invalidation, rooted in ignorance rather than malice, compels mourners to endure their grief in silence. This leads us to question: if adults face such invalidation in their grief, what about children? Children often form deep, meaningful bonds with their pets, sharing daily experiences filled with love and companionship. Common responses like "They are small; they do not understand," or "Just get another pet," fail to recognize the depth of these relationships.

In response to this reality, Funeraria Jaramillo, driven by a strong sense of social responsibility, recognized an urgent need to address this gap through our Bereavement Care Unit. We launched the micro-theater production "Puente Arcoíris, El cielo de las mascotas," targeting children in various educational settings. This project encourages psychoeducation on grief in children through theater, facilitating emotional identification and validation of their feelings. The theatrical production promotes open communication about death, reduces stigma, promotes emotional resilience, and includes farewell rituals such as "the box of memories." Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of psychological care during a loss, offering a free bereavement support service from our Bereavement Unit.

The micro-theater draws inspiration "Rainbow Bridge" poem by Edna Clyne-Rekhy, an 82-year-old Scottish artist who penned this moving piece after losing her beloved Labrador Retriever, Major, at the age of 19. Her mother's advice to articulate her grief led to the creation of a poem that beautifully encapsulates the essence of loss and hope:

"Just this side of heaven is a place called Rainbow Bridge.

When an animal dies that has been especially close to someone here, that pet goes to Rainbow Bridge. There are meadows and hills for all of our special friends so they can run and play together. There is plenty of food and water and our friends are warm and comfortable.

All the animals who have been ill and old are restored to health and vigor. Those who are hurt or maimed are made strong again, just as we remember them in our dreams of days and times gone by. The animals are happy and content except for one small thing; they miss someone very special to them, who had to be left behind.

They all run and play together but the day comes when one suddenly stops and looks into the distance. His bright eyes are intent. His eager body quivers. Suddenly he begins to run from the group, flying over the green grass, his legs carrying him faster and faster.

You have been spotted, and when you and your special friend finally meet you cling on joyous reunion, never to be apart again. The happy kisses rain upon your face, your hands caress the beloved head and

once more you look into the trusting eyes of your beloved pet, so long gone from your life but never absent from your heart.

Then you cross Rainbow Bridge together....”

Inspired by this moving poem, we adapted the micro-theater “Puente Arcoiris. el cielo de las mascotas,” which narrates the story of Pablo, a 10-year-old boy, and his dog Lucas. After Lucas’ death, a fairy narrator appears to comfort Pablo by sharing the legend of the Rainbow Bridge. This touching narrative, set in the innocence of childhood, conveys a message of eternal love and hope that transcends time and space, offering Pablo the certainty of a future reunion with Lucas. The play is distinguished by its profound serenity and the magic of its characters.

At the conclusion of the micro-theater, our Unit’s therapist explains to the children the significance of the scenography, which includes an “altar” –a space to honor the life, love, and memory of their pet, where their belongings rest- The specialist provides the children with the necessary tools to cope with their loss, giving them a physical storybook titled “El cielo de las mascotas del Puente Arcoiris (The Heaven of the Rainbow Bridge Pets). To conclude, playful activities are conducted to foster unity and companionship among the participants. Finally, with the support of the institution’s psychologist and the consent of the children’s representatives, we schedule free sessions to support the grief of the children, their parents, and even other community members, such as teachers.

This initiative is part of the annual Bereavement Care Unit’s planning, which has been active for four years. The play has been presented without interruption, reaching various educational institutions, both public and private, and touching the hearts of approximately 1035 children in 17 institutions. This initiative has been enriched by the invaluable coordination of collaborative staff and the Psychology Departments of the participating institutions.

We culminated our annual planning with a moving performance in April of this year during “Student Week 2024” \*1, organized by the Loja Municipal Social Support Center. This event took place at the emblematic Bolivar Theater, located in the historic heart of the city, with a capacity of 277 people. We welcomed children and adolescents from public, semi-public, and private institutions, accompanying them through art.

To ensure the sustainability of the project, we also relied on the generous and committed collaboration of our company’s personnel, who developed their innate theatrical skills under the guidance of a professional in the performing arts. This joint effort resulted in a ten-minute micro-theater production, following meticulous pre-production and two weeks of intensive daily rehearsals. The dedication extended to set design, sound recording and mastering, and the development of the technical script, ensuring a precise and coordinated production. This project, an example of talent, creativity, and teamwork; provided a compact yet profoundly impactful theatrical experience, executed under the following structure:

**Costume:** Two costumes were created to represent the characters Pablo and Lucas, and the fairy narrator’s costume was designed to be eye-catching for the children.

**Scenery and Props:** Designed with a child-friendly approach, the set features a landscape dominated by a rainbow and various animal species, offering a cheerful and colorful atmosphere. Additionally, an altar was arranged with Lucas’ belongings, used by the therapist to teach the importance of creating a space of remembrance and honor.

**Sound:** Several voices were recorded for the voice-over narration, and the complete audio of the play was edited, mastered and prepared.

**Actors:** Our staff participates as actors in this play and currently review the script before each presentation with the support of one of our collaborators.

Our staff was dedicated to ensuring the success of the event. They assisted in the assembly and disassembly of the stage, transported the necessary materials, and worked collaboratively to promote the

event. In total, six people were involved, including the cast and the therapist. Thanks to their commitment, we were able to offer an unforgettable event.

This project, "Puente Arcoiris, El Cielo de las Mascotas" (Rainbow Bridge, Pet's Heaven), emerged alongside the introduction of a new pet cremation service Funeraria Jaramillo\*2, carrying the same name in its brand, accompanied by its value promise: "A goodbye with care and respect for your special friends." This service has had a profound and unexpected impact due to the emotional story behind it. It is offered with the same care and sensitivity as for human loved ones. With this new service, we have opened a new panorama, transforming our funeral home from a service traditionally associated with sadness into one that brings color and hope. This has helped to establish our brand as a compassionate and sustainable entity in the community.

\*1 The Student Week in Loja is an annual event of great significance that celebrates and recognizes the talent, effort, and dedication of Loja students. It is organized by the Municipality of Loja through the Municipal Social Support Center.

\*2 Funeraria Jaramillo, a recognized brand in the funeral services sector, operates under the ownership and management of Previsión Exequial La Esperanza. This relationship provides the support and expertise necessary to expand and enhance our service offerings.

**Funeraria San Vicente S.A., Medellin, Colombia**

### **Interdisciplinary Meeting on Death and Bereavement**

"A setting for dialogue, learning and raising awareness about the importance of grief support in our society."

Rationale behind the idea.

For San Vicente Funeral Home and its Grief Counselling Center it has always been of utmost importance to promote academic and social scenarios that promote dialogue between different disciplines in order to approach grief in multiple ways that overcome academic, clinical and cultural barriers.

For this reason, since 2016, and every two years since, the academic, social and cultural event "Interdisciplinary Meeting on Death and Grief" has been held in the city of Medellin where users of the Grief Counselling Center, their families, health personnel and professionals in the social and human sciences participate in conferences, testimonies, workshops, training and cultural activities that promote greater sensitivity and knowledge about bereavement.

Since talking about death in our modern societies often generates resistance, San Vicente Funeral Home, faithful to its mission to disseminate knowledge and accompany people in mourning in light of current theoretical references, as well as facing the prejudices of those who consider our work as "atypical" and even "undesirable", invites both mourners and non-mourners to be updated and sensitized on an issue that, in one way or another, concerns us all.

Times change, as do the ways of ritualizing. However, as the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic (Covid-19) reminded us, grief is always present when losing a loved one; hence, going through this experience is complex and requires a lot of work. Although some theoretical and practical tools are available, it is vitally important to provide scenarios that invite dialogue on the different ways of experiencing loss, facilitate emotional expression and offer hope for future recovery as inputs for the construction of a more humane and respectful social fabric in the face of death and grief.

Detailed description of the program, service or activity.

In light of the above, in 2016 San Vicente Funeral Home offered the "First Interdisciplinary Meeting on Death and Grief", aimed at professionals and students in the area of health and the social and human sciences, as well as artists, communicators, and representatives of the Church.

After several months of preparation headed by the team of psychologists of the Grief Counselling Center and the communications department of San Vicente Funeral Home, speakers are selected and invited from different areas of knowledge: music, anthropology, fashion design, literature, psychology, medicine, psychiatry, etc., who share their perspectives on how to understand grief and how best to support those who are grieving, as well as their reflections and latest research. There are educational workshops and a discussion with all those attending the event in which concerns are clarified and proposals made to improve the care of the bereaved.

At the end of the day, there is a cultural exhibition related to the theme of grief, which embraces different artistic expressions such as music, dance, storytelling, theater, etc.

Benefits provided to funeral home and staff.

Twenty-six years ago, San Vicente Funeral Home decided to create the Grief Counselling Center because there were no spaces in the city that offered support for those who had lost their loved ones. Since its founding, validating the pain not only of our users but of the community in general -and contributing to their welfare through social and academic programs- has been a fundamental pillar of our company, where each of its members understands the personal and social implications of working as a funeral home employee. In these twenty-six years of work the Grief Counselling Center has demystified the image of the undertaker as cold and insensitive to pain and death. Every member of our staff can proudly say that they practice one of the noblest professions, which is to accompany the process of saying farewell to those loved ones who have passed away and those who survive them in their grief.

In addition to this, the Interdisciplinary Meeting on Death and Grief broadens the perception of our collaborators regarding the different points of view from which grief can be approached, clarifying that ritualization is not limited exclusively to funeral environments, so that, as social agents responsible for the welfare of our community, dialogue with other discourses enriches the development and execution of our social programs.

Benefits provided to families and/or the community at large.

Something that has always characterized San Vicente Funeral Home and its social and academic programs is that they are offered to the entire community: to mourners and non-mourners, professionals from different areas of knowledge, and people who for one reason or another want to know a little more about grief and funeral rituals.

Every two years, when the Interdisciplinary Meeting on Death and Mourning is held, approximately 200 people attend, which shows the importance and interest that reflections on grief have nowadays. This a sufficient reason for us as a funeral company to continue the commitment made to the community 26 years ago when we created the Grief Counselling Center to provide training and a cultural space to generate greater awareness of death, grief and mourning.

For this reason San Vicente Funeral Home will continue to generate these spaces, which undoubtedly enrich the social fabric and offer empathy and compassion, which we need as a community that has to accept death as an unavoidable fact that at some point we all have to face.

## **Hightower Family Funeral Homes, Carrollton, GA**

*Hightower Family Funeral Homes, Bremen, GA; Hightower Family Funeral Homes, Douglasville, GA*

Men and women often experience the loss of a spouse in distinct ways. As a result, it's important for grief support groups and resources to be sensitive to those differences. Tailoring support and resources to the specific needs of each gender can help provide more meaningful and effective assistance during such a difficult time.

In 1996, Martin & Hightower Funeral Home founded the Circle of Friends, a pioneering support group tailored for widows. This compassionate and inviting group convenes on a monthly basis to share a potluck meal and partake in engaging programs presented by local businesses, entertainers, and other community members.

This year, in response to the needs of our community, Hightower's Helping Hand was established to provide support for widowers. The group convenes on the third Tuesday of each month to share a meal and fellowship. Throughout the month, the group collectively engages in various service projects. These service projects are tailored to meet the specific needs of widows in our other grief support groups. For example, if a widow requires assistance with hanging a ceiling fan, the members of Hightower's Helping Hands gladly rally together to provide the necessary support. This initiative not only empowers widowers, giving them a sense of purpose and fulfillment but also ensures that practical assistance is readily available to the widows in our community, making them feel valued and supported.

Over the past twelve months, the dedicated widowers of Hightower's Helping Hands have undertaken various projects to support widows in need. Their efforts include installing blinds to enhance privacy, putting up sturdy railings to ensure safety, tending to landscaping needs to spruce up outdoor areas, replacing shower heads for improved comfort, and constructing a ramp to facilitate accessibility for a widow who now relies on a wheelchair.

Hightower's Helping Hands serves as a supportive community that unites men from diverse backgrounds, offering them a secure environment to discuss their individual experiences with grief openly. Additionally, the organization provides these men with opportunities to find a sense of purpose, as it acknowledges their inherent need to feel valued and essential.

At Hightower Family Funeral Homes, we take pride in our ability to connect widows who are in need of support with compassionate widowers who are willing to lend a helping hand. This meaningful initiative has not only allowed our dedicated staff and aftercare coordinator to establish genuine, long-lasting relationships, but it has also played a significant role in bridging an important gap within our community. We are committed to ensuring that those who have lost a spouse receive the care and support they need during that challenging time, and we are honored to be able to facilitate these valuable connections.

## **Mercer-Adams Funeral Service, Bethany, OK**

Mercer-Adams Funeral Service has been active in our community in a variety of ways throughout our service to the Oklahoma City/Bethany metro area. Chris Finley called and asked if we would consider presenting a seminar on coping with grief for their residents who had experienced a death and asked for help. Chris Finley is the head chaplain for Baptist Villages of Oklahoma which are retirement communities sponsored by Oklahoma Southern Baptists.

We decided to use the GriefShare program for the content of the seminar. Chris spread the word through the Oklahoma City Baptist Village community, and we posted the availability of classes on the GriefShare website for anyone in the OKC community who was interested. When everything was scheduled, there were eleven signed up to attend. The sessions were planned to last one and one half to two hours each including discussion time and viewing of the GriefShare videos. There was a good bit of familiarity among the group, and that provided an opportunity to be more open and candid in the discussions. As the participants shared their experiences with grief there was a sense of relief as it was discovered that they weren't alone. Many had similar feelings and struggles they were dealing with in their lives, and that was comforting to recognize. They also agreed that many of the people attempting to comfort them were not that helpful in what they said as it often felt like they were being rushed to get back to their normal lives. Another point of discussion was how GriefShare had helped them find hope that they would be able to find joy and peace again even with the dramatic changes of life they had experience.

At the conclusion of the seminar, we had a party and evaluated the effectiveness of the process we had just shared. There was agreement that much of what we talked about had gone by too quickly and needed to be worked through again. Seven of the original eleven repeated the seminar when we scheduled the next sessions. Baptist Village was excited with the success of the program and asked us to continue working with their residents struggling with grief. We are continuing to present the seminar twice a year as long as a need exists. The awareness of the program spread in the Baptist Village community and several people stopped by just to see if it could be helpful to them. We often see them in the next series of meetings.

This series was led by our funeral home Controller, Randy Gordon. Randy's education includes a B.A. from Oklahoma Baptist University, Master's in Philosophy from Baylor University and has completed Disaster and Chaplaincy requirements for national response teams. Mercer-Adams feels a responsibility to those who have lost someone in their family. We want to continue to reinforce our motto of "before, during and after, we understand the language of comfort".

## **Miles Funeral Home, Holden, MA**

*Miles-Sterling Funeral Home, Sterling, MA; Kelly Cremation and Funeral Care, Worcester, MA*

Introduction: Childhood and youth bereavement care is one of the most critical services families seek following the death of a parent, sibling, grandparent, friend or other relative. Unfortunately, most communities do not have adequate programs, therapists or bereavement groups for children and teens. Some communities have none. Miles Funeral Home has played a significant role in collaborating with Hope Lives Here (HLH) to develop a bereavement program for teens ages 12-18. After more than two years of work, the program begins in July 2024.

Rationale: According to the Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model (CBEM): 1 in 12 (or more than 8 percent) of children in the US will experience the death of a parent or sibling by age 18-equating to 6 million bereaved US children and teens. This number more than doubles to 14.7 million when the age is increased to 25. Childhood bereavement support is a significant issue. The availability of peer support groups for young people is drastically low compared to adults. In our service area the nearest peer support group for grieving teens is in Arlington, MA, a one-hour drive each way. In our funeral home alone, the number of young people who have lost either a parent, sibling or close friend, warrants a strong after care support program. The overwhelming need and the potential mental health consequences for young people led us to become a strong advocate and participant in the development of a local aftercare support group for young people.

Grief affects the physical, emotional and social health of children and teens, and unresolved grief can result in lifelong mental health issues. The dominant narrative in our culture and indeed in many families is that children do not grieve as adults. Unfortunately, this thinking has created a society where much of the grief support that adults can access is unavailable to children, including peer support groups. And in cases where families recognize the need for intervention after a death, the wait for clinical support such as a grief therapist who works with children can be as long as a year. Things began to change in 1982, when the Dougy Center in Colorado began offering what has become a world renown model for peer support groups for children and teens.

In 2022, Miles Funeral Home began working with Hope Lives Here, an all-volunteer, non-profit organization that hosts several bi-weekly support groups. (<https://www.hlhgrief.org/events>) A year later, we began working with the local high school to support staff and students who experience a death loss, and to educate staff in grief and bereavement. (<https://wrhs.wrsd.net/>) It became clear to us through this work that forming a collaboration between the three groups to develop services and programming for teens was desirable. The blending of a small non-profit, a public education system and a funeral home has afforded goodwill and many opportunities. Because of our collaboration, teens in our area will have access to resources that will promote healing from grief, especially an opportunity to participate in a bi-weekly youth peer support bereavement group. Creating a grief-informed culture, talking about death openly with leadership from the funeral industry will help create a stronger, more compassionate community. It's a win-win-win endeavor and most of all, young people enduring loss will be surrounded with the people and resources that can effectively support them. Miles has been working with the local high school for two years, offering education and resources, and looks forward to helping the school and Hope Lives Here achieve their goals for a grief-informed culture, where the adult community is prepared to support young people through loss.

Hope Lives Here is an all-volunteer organization therefore the contribution of our funeral home in lending our director of community education free of charge to them has been a substantial contribution. Miles has paid for the hours our Director of Community Education has contributed to the project of beginning the youth bereavement program, an investment we consider well worthwhile in the efforts to improve services for bereaved children and youth. Providing expertise in bereavement, organization of youth related groups and securing an intern through relationships with local colleges were specific tasks we assumed as attending monthly meetings for the project.

Miles Funeral Home's ongoing role in the youth bereavement program includes the following:

- Act as a resource person for HLH and Wachusett Regional High School in the areas of funeral care, bereavement and youth grief.
- Assist families with special needs or concerns during public or private services, attending to children's needs, individuals with special needs.
- Gather and share resources for special circumstances such as death by suicide, drug-related death or unexpected death.
- Provide training sessions for Hope Lives Here volunteers including communications skills and grief education.
- Share knowledge and resources from working and collaborating with other community providers who are experts in grief and loss.
- Attend special meetings relative to grief and loss programming or funeral services.

There are many benefits for the funeral home and staff. First and foremost is the bereavement care offered to youth in a formal program we have helped to develop. Helping young people grieve well is an important investment in creating a future customer-base that is educated in what funeral care provides. Both the school staff and HLH volunteers have received education and resources from Miles including many death and aftercare resources such as books, films, and articles, and NFDA resources and booklets. The support and education we provide two prominent organizations in our community has yielded more grief-informed professionals in our community, making our work more understood and valued. The Miles staff has been educated and informed on the development of the youth program for the duration of its planning phase. Funeral Directors are well versed in the availability of the resources for young people and utilize our Director of Community Education as a resource as needed. Funeral Directors and Miles staff have a deep sensitivity for teens and parents of young families in grief. Staff likewise has availability to our website blogs which feature education on supporting the grieving child or teen.

Benefits provided to families and/or the community at large are clear. Grief is hard work, it can be deeply painful, and can debilitate one's daily life. When a parent has lost a spouse, their children's grief is one of their greatest concerns. One woman left widowed with three kids was driving her children more than two hours weekly to get quality bereavement services for them. With all the added responsibilities and daily tasks added to her life as a result of her husband's death, having a bereavement group for even one of them, would have as she put it, "been a gift from God." Having grief informed teens is another important benefit. When there is a teen death by suicide, or drug related death in town, young people are often left feeling insecure and anxious about their own mental health. Having grief-informed teen in the community will offer them support within their peer group and in their social settings – a huge plus for teenagers who often do not easily reach out to adults.

Miles Funeral Home is excited to be an important player in the collaborative development of youth bereavement services in our area. Our most significant contribution was to pay the salary of our Director of Community Education who gave more than 100 hours to this project providing her expert knowledge of young people (she is a former high school teacher) and her expertise in grief. As a part of the planning committee, she attended meetings for more than a year, bringing and using Miles resources. She was solely responsible for developing an internship, which included reaching out to the colleges, developing the plan for an intern, speaking at the colleges and recruiting and communicating with candidates. She also participated in the eight-hour certification training from the Dougy Center, ensuring that each person designing the program had certification in youth bereavement and also participated in meeting with and receiving training in youth peer support groups at Hope Floats a youth bereavement organization in Kingston, MA. As with any two-year endeavor, there are so many things to do and staying with the process through its ups and downs means being committed for the long haul. Indeed, Miles Funeral Home has and will continue to do whatever it takes and then some to create a first-rate, thriving bereavement program for young people in our community. Miles Funeral Home has been an important part of families grieving for more than 125 years, as always, we look forward to any community engagement that supports people in their loss.

**Morada da Paz, Parnamirim, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil**

## **Wellness Center "Morada do Cuidado": Innovation in Grief Support**

We launched the wellness center "Morada do Cuidado," a new business focused on mental health care, which centralizes our aftercare program but also meets other demands, not limited to grief. Located in a distinctive building in a prime area of the city, near renowned clinics and hospitals, this space was designed to offer comprehensive and personalized care in a comfortable and safe environment.

The new brand "Morada do Cuidado" maintains a connection with "Morada da Paz," but expands the scope of activities to include other health professionals. Consequently, several psychologists with established client portfolios have moved their practices to this new address. Ten professionals are already working at this location, providing services to clients ranging from children to the elderly. The space includes seven consultation rooms, one of which is dedicated to group activities, and a spacious and welcoming reception area, including a kids' space for children.

In addition to launching a new business and a new care concept, we have completely restructured our aftercare program to offer even more comprehensive and specialized support. At "Morada do Cuidado," we provide a wide range of services, including free counseling sessions with grief specialists, grief psychotherapy for those needing prolonged support, and the listening group "Chá da Saudade" for sharing experiences and mutual support. We also offer legal guidance to deal with post-death legal issues and specific resources for child grief through the "Turma do Vilinha" project, among other services that we will illustrate below. Our goal is to ensure that all bereaved families receive comprehensive and high-quality care, helping them face the grieving process with dignity and understanding.

### **Rationale behind the idea**

At Morada da Paz, our focus has always been on providing preventive services, not against death, but against the financial and emotional burdens associated with arranging a funeral, which can be quite costly. We have invested heavily in the delivery of services, always seeking quality, personalization, and tributes that make the farewell as dignified as possible. This is evidenced by our high Net Promoter Score (NPS) and the continuous growth of the company, resulting from our attention to bereaved families.

However, we identified a significant gap in post-funeral support (aftercare). We realized that while for our company the customer's journey ended after the burial or cremation, for the bereaved families, this journey was just beginning. It was from this realization that the idea of creating "Morada do Cuidado," a space dedicated to the care and support of people facing the grieving process, was born.

But we soon realized that the space could also serve other clients more broadly, navigating other existential challenges, not just grief. We saw that there was a pent-up demand for high-quality mental health therapeutic spaces and that we could bring the high-quality care from Morada da Paz to this audience. We saw a lot of synergy, as it is already part of our DNA to work with welcoming others' pain. Thus, it made a lot of sense to create a new business and offer this experience to other people.

In addition to creating this physical space, we consolidated all aftercare services and resources, whether physical or digital, into a single comprehensive and continuous program. Additionally, we developed new and innovative services and resources, such as the "Memory Box" and the "affective jewelry," among others, to provide even more complete and meaningful support to bereaved families, detailed in the sections below.

### **Detailed description of the program, service or activity**

Morada do Cuidado is a wellness center in Natal, where we offer a wide range of emotional and psychological support services. Our team of qualified professionals provides specialized care, helping the bereaved to understand and process their losses. Additionally, the space is available to other mental health professionals, creating a new revenue source and increasing the visibility of our brand.

The main services offered by Morada do Cuidado include:

1. Free Counseling Session:

We offer our clients a free session with a grief specialist. The purpose is to provide comfort, support, and hope to help the bereaved adapt to this new journey. This initial service aims to offer immediate support and assess the need for additional follow-up.

2. Grief Psychotherapy:

Since each grief journey is unique, some people may require more prolonged specialized support. If the grieving process is very difficult, even after seeking some resources and support, we offer grief psychotherapy services provided by specialized professionals. In addition to our own team of psychologists, we have partner psychologists available to meet these demands, offering specialized support and differentiated values for Morada da Paz clients.

3. Support Group "Chá da Saudade":

Chá da Saudade is a support group mediated by a grief psychologist, where participants can share their emotions and feelings during the grieving process and listen to stories from others in similar situations. The meetings are held monthly at Morada do Cuidado Wellness Center and are offered free of charge. This service provides a welcoming environment for conversations and mutual support, aiming to offer comfort and understanding during the period of loss.

4. Legal Guidance:

The legal guidance service offers professional assistance in dealing with legal matters that arise after someone's death. Although it is not mandatory to hire a lawyer, legal assistance can be essential to ensure everything is handled correctly. This service covers the execution of wills and inheritances, estate planning, and resolution of death-related legal issues, such as property transfers, contract cancellations, debt settlements, and insurance. To facilitate this process, we offer exclusive discounts at affiliated law firms, providing practical support and emotional comfort during a delicate time.

5. Turma do Vilha: Resources and Guidance for Dealing with Child Grief:

Turma do Vilha is a project created to help families deal with child grief, offering resources and guidance on how to approach the news of a death with children. The project includes stories, booklets with playful language, and educational games that address feelings and death, providing children with a healthy way to understand and process the loss.

6. Morada da Memória: Online Memorial to Preserve Memories and Legacies:

Morada da Memória is an online service offered by Morada da Paz that allows creating and maintaining a digital memorial for a deceased loved one. This space allows family and friends to share photos, texts, and memories, preserving the memory and legacy of the person for future generations. In addition to valuing memories, the memorial offers comfort to the bereaved, allowing the expression of longing and the exchange of messages of support and affection.

URL: [www.moradadamemoria.com.br](http://www.moradadamemoria.com.br)

7. Digital Content:

On the Morada do Cuidado website, the bereaved can access various reliable and relevant materials for navigating grief for free. Developed with sensitivity and dedication by Morada da Paz's grief psychology team, the site serves as a refuge of specialized information for the bereaved and their support network. It

features targeted videos, book tips, music, and films, aiming to provide comfort, understanding, and guidance during this challenging period.

#### 8. Morada do Cuidado Podcast:

The Morada do Cuidado podcast aims to change society's perspective on death by promoting informative and healthy dialogues on the topic. With episodes in videocast format, the program is available on Morada da Paz's YouTube channel and major audio platforms such as Spotify, Deezer, and Amazon Music. The podcast features guests who share experiences and knowledge, offering deep reflection and learning about death and grief.

#### 9. Lectures, Courses, and Workshops:

We hold lectures, courses, and workshops for both internal employees and the external public. These events focus on education and awareness about the grieving process. They are open to everyone, regardless of whether they are Morada da Paz clients, aiming to promote a deeper understanding and effective support during grief. In this context, we annually hold a symposium open to the entire health community, where we invite renowned professionals to present alongside our internal team on topics related to loss and grief. These educational programs also serve to train our employees, ensuring they are always updated and prepared to offer the best possible care.

These are the main services and resources offered by the Morada da Paz aftercare program. Additionally, there is also the rental of rooms for other health professionals. This rental is available by shift or by room, at the professional's discretion.

### **How the Program Works**

The Morada do Cuidado program is initially communicated to the bereaved family during the funeral service planning process. The family is informed about the need for a post-burial or cremation meeting to finalize the funeral service and provide post-funeral guidance. The professional responsible for coordinating and accompanying the funeral services with the family is the same person who will contact the family a few days later to schedule the aftercare meeting. These meetings usually take place at the Morada do Cuidado Wellness Center.

When the family arrives, they are directed to a room specially prepared for this meeting. The objectives of this meeting are:

1. Reception and delivery of any pending documents, whether from the funeral or the cemetery - if the burial took place in one of our cemeteries.
2. Presenting the family with the full portfolio of aftercare services and resources available through the Morada do Cuidado program, including scheduling the free session they are entitled to with one of our grief psychologists.
3. Delivering the cremation urn, if the family opted for cremation.
4. Providing the "Memory Box," which includes:
  - A pamphlet explaining and offering all the services and resources provided by the Morada do Cuidado program.
  - Messages from flower wreaths sent by friends and family present at the funeral.
  - A photo frame with the deceased's photo used during the wake or farewell ceremony.
  - An artisanal affective jewelry piece made of resin with the deceased's DNA (ashes or hair), as a unique and exclusive tribute. The family is entitled to one complimentary piece and can purchase additional pieces separately.

Additionally, we ask the client to leave a review of our business on Google Business, providing a card with the URL and QR CODE of the attended unit.

### **Benefits provided to funeral home and staff**

The "Morada do Cuidado" program brought significant benefits to our company and team:

1. Customer Loyalty:

By offering a complete range of aftercare services, we increased the contact surface with families, reinforcing customer loyalty. The continuity of the relationship after the initial funeral service creates a lasting bond and mutual trust, which is crucial for loyalty.

2. Customer Delight:

Elements such as the Memory Box and Affective Jewelry create emotional and memorable experiences for customers, differentiating us from the competition. These initiatives demonstrate our commitment to continuous and personalized care, exceeding customer expectations and creating a delight that strengthens our reputation.

3. Brand Image Return:

The expansion of positive word of mouth and higher ratings on Google Business have increased our reputation and visibility. The recognition from satisfied and emotionally moved customers translates into a positive brand image, attracting new customers and solidifying our market position.

4. Team Morale and Professionalism:

Being involved in a program that makes a difference in the lives of bereaved families significantly impacts team morale and professionalism. Employees feel more valued and motivated when they see the positive impact of their work, leading to a more harmonious and productive work environment.

5. Creativity and Innovation:

The development and implementation of the Morada do Cuidado program encouraged creativity and innovation within the team. The challenge of creating and maintaining such a comprehensive and differentiated program fostered a culture of continuous innovation, where all team members are encouraged to contribute new ideas and improvements.

6. New Revenue Source:

Finally, we also created a new revenue source by renting rooms to other mental health professionals who, at the same time, benefit from the increased flow of people and possible new patient referrals.

**Benefits provided to families and/or the community at large**

Clients who participate in the Morada do Cuidado program report great satisfaction with the services offered. The availability of physical and digital resources provides comfort and guidance during the grieving period. Various types of grief, including parental, child, and pet loss, are considered, ensuring comprehensive support.

1. Continuous Emotional Support:

Families benefit from continuous and specialized support offered by Morada do Cuidado. Grief psychotherapy and support groups provide a safe and welcoming space for the expression of emotions, helping to reduce the pain and loneliness associated with grief.

2. Memory Preservation:

Morada da Memória and the Memory Box allow families to preserve and celebrate the memories of their loved ones meaningfully. These resources offer comfort and a tangible way to honor the deceased's life and legacy, helping families deal with longing and maintain the emotional connection.

### 3. Education and Awareness:

The podcast and digital content promote education and awareness about grief and death, demystifying these topics and promoting healthy dialogues in society. These resources provide valuable information that helps families understand and navigate the grieving process more informed and supported.

### 4. Specialized Support for Children:

The Turma do Viliinha project offers playful and educational resources that help children understand and deal with loss, providing crucial support during a period of confusion and sadness. This project ensures that children's emotional needs are adequately and sensitively addressed.

## **Partnerships**

Our grief psychology team conducts awareness work in public and private hospitals in the city, where they give lectures on the theme of loss and grief, as this is often where the process begins. In this educational work, we end up promoting the services of Morada do Cuidado to hospital professionals, thus expanding the dissemination of our services. In addition to the work carried out in hospitals, we also promote our space to other related entities that are somehow in contact with the context of death and grief, such as nursing homes, hospices, pet clinics and hospitals, and non-profit organizations dealing with terminal illnesses. This allows more people and organizations to know our services and refer those in need of support to our program.

## **Improvements and ongoing efforts**

Although the Morada do Cuidado program is relatively new, we are continuously evaluating and improving our services to better meet the needs of bereaved families. Innovation and the pursuit of excellence in our care are constant, ensuring that our services evolve over time. Client and staff feedback is regularly collected and analyzed to identify areas for improvement and implement changes that increase the program's effectiveness and scope.

One idea already absorbed is to provide a library of books related to the theme of grief and loss in the Wellness Center. This library will be an additional resource for bereaved families, giving them access to materials that can help them understand and process their grief experiences more deeply and informedly.

Our commitment is to continue innovating and expanding our services to provide the best possible support to the families we serve.

## **Roller Funeral Homes, Little Rock, AR**

*Roller Burns Funeral Home, Yellville, AR; Roller Funeral Home, Mountain Home, AR; Roller Funeral Homes, Paris, AR; Roller-Alcoa Funeral Home, Benton, AR; Roller-Christeson Funeral Home, Harrison, AR; Roller-Citizens Funeral Home, West Helena, AR; Roller-Citizens Funeral Home, Marianna, AR; Roller-Citizens Funeral Home, West Memphis, AR; Roller-Coffman Funeral Home, Mountain View, AR; Roller-Coffman Funeral Home, Marshall, AR; Roller-Cox Funeral Home, Clarksville, AR; Roller-Crouch Funeral Home, Batesville, AR; Roller-Daniel Funeral Home, Searcy, AR; Roller-Drummond Funeral Home Southwest, Little Rock, AR; Roller-England Funeral Home, England, AR; Roller-Farmers Union Funeral Home, Jonesboro, AR; Roller-McNutt Funeral Home, Conway, AR; Roller-McNutt Funeral Home, Clinton, AR; Roller-McNutt Funeral Home-Greenbrier, Greenbrier, AR; Roller-Owens Funeral Home, North Little Rock, AR; Roller-Swift Funeral Home, Osceola, AR*

## **Comfort from the Kitchen – An Innovative Approach to Grief Support**

Introduction: At Roller Funeral Homes, we continually seek innovative ways to support grieving families and our community. Our latest initiative, "Comfort from the Kitchen," is a unique webpage dedicated to celebrating Southern funeral food traditions. This program offers comfort and healing by bringing people together through shared recipes and culinary traditions.

Description of the Innovative Program: The "Comfort from the Kitchen" webpage provides a platform for families to share their favorite comforting recipes, fostering a sense of community and participation. Recognizing the therapeutic power of food, this initiative allows individuals to connect and support each other through the shared experience of preparing and enjoying meals. The webpage features a collection of recipes, including some from our own staff and families we serve, each accompanied by personal stories and memories that add a layer of emotional connection.

Implementation and Execution: To develop this webpage, we gathered cherished recipes from our staff and the families we serve, ensuring a diverse collection that reflects the rich culinary heritage of the South. We launched the webpage with an engaging and user-friendly interface where visitors can browse, submit, and share recipes. To promote the webpage, we appeared on the popular local TV show "Good Morning Arkansas." During the segment, Renata Jenkins Byler demonstrated how to cook one of the featured recipes on air. This not only showcased the delicious comfort food but also highlighted the program's deeper purpose – helping families grieve through the shared experience of food. We discussed how cooking and sharing recipes can keep the memory of loved ones alive and provide a tangible way for friends and community members to support those in mourning.

Impact and Benefits: "Comfort from the Kitchen" has provided an invaluable resource for grieving families, offering them a way to find solace and comfort through familiar dishes. The program encourages community members to actively participate by sharing their recipes, thus creating a support network. Friends and family can contribute by cooking and delivering meals, helping those in mourning feel supported and cared for. The positive feedback from participants highlights the program's success in bringing people together and aiding in the healing process. Stories of families finding joy in cooking together, even in times of sorrow, underscore the profound impact of this initiative.

The program also offers an avenue for friends and community members who may feel helpless in the face of a loved one's grief. By contributing a recipe or delivering a homemade meal, they can provide tangible support and show their compassion in a meaningful way. The act of preparing and sharing food becomes a gesture of love and solidarity, reinforcing the bonds within the community. Additionally, sharing a loved one's special recipe helps keep their memory alive, turning a simple meal into a cherished tribute.

Conclusion: The "Comfort from the Kitchen" initiative exemplifies Roller Funeral Homes' dedication to innovative and compassionate service. By leveraging the comforting power of food, we continue to support our community in meaningful ways, ensuring that no one has to grieve alone. This program reinforces our commitment to excellence and our mission to provide unwavering support during times of loss. Through "Comfort from the Kitchen," we have created a lasting legacy of care and community, demonstrating that even in the face of grief, there is always a way to connect, heal, and find comfort.

## **St. Peter Chapels, Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines**

### **Music Heals Grieving Hearts**

Words cannot always describe how we feel. For those who have experienced the loss of a loved one, the grief and the feelings of sadness, anger, or longing can be very intense, that words often fail to express these. When language fails, we turn to MUSIC.

Music is a universal language that overcomes the limitations of words. Music allows one to express or release intense emotions like grief, that are otherwise difficult to articulate. Music then becomes a sanctuary for the grieving soul. Music can evoke and channel different emotions as well as connect a person to memories of deceased loved ones thereby enabling the bereaved to cope with the loss and move on.

Pursuant to our goals to continuously improve and enhance our DeathCare Services, and to help our bereaved clients heal from the loss of their loved ones and help them manage their grief, we ventured into MUSIC THERAPY.

According to the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA), "music therapy is the clinical & evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program." It has been widely used abroad in hospitals, hospices, nursing homes, schools, mental health clinics and funeral homes.

In an article published by the renowned Cleveland Clinic, some of the benefits of music therapy include relaxation, self-expression, reduced stress, pain, anxiety and depression, improved physical coordination, memory and self-confidence, and mood regulation.

Angela Delaney, a licensed music therapist based in Australia, wrote in an article for The Leukaemia Foundation, that "the elements of music rhythm, melody, harmony, dynamics, timbre, and form address our basic sensory needs. Amidst the power and unpredictability of grief, music and music therapy have the capacity to provide predictability and comfort; ameliorate distress; and provide adaptive coping and wellbeing... The use of original therapist/group-composed songs is effective in decreasing the physical grief symptoms during bereavement and to elicit suppressed emotions due to grief... music therapy interventions such as songwriting and improvisation, support positive growth and the processing of grief."

In the Philippines however, the practice of music therapy in grief therapy is still in its infancy stage with very few practitioners. It is still not widely promoted as a profession and as a service.

St. Peter Chapels saw this as an opportunity to introduce another FIRST in the history of the Philippine DeathCare Services Industry. St. Peter Chapels has decided to become the FIRST funeral home to offer music therapy in the Philippines!

Under the umbrella of its grief management program, the St. Peter Healing Hands, St. Peter Chapels launched FREE MUSICAL ENCOUNTERS - a month-long series of music therapy sessions offered for free to clients of St. Peter Chapels and their families and friends. Each

musical encounter or music therapy session was facilitated in a private room at the chapel by a licensed music therapist for 60 to 90 minutes. The goal of the activity was to jumpstart the healing journey for the participants through engaging music therapy tools and techniques such as listening to music, singing, guided imagery and music, instrument playing, lyric substitution, songwriting, etc.

St. Peter Chapels commissioned the professional services of one of the first music therapists in the country, Dr. Estrella "Doc Yangky" R. Agustin, PhD, MFLCD, MAM-MT, BM. Doc Yangky is a Bachelor of Music (BM) graduate from the University of the Philippines with a Master of Arts degree in Music Major in Music Therapy (MAM-MT) at the St. Paul University of Manila. She is also a cognitive behavior therapist with a Master's Degree in Family Life and Child Development (MFLCD) from the University of the Philippines.

The activity had two (2) separate runs. The first implementation was held in celebration of the Love Month of February at St. Peter Chapels Commonwealth, Quezon City on February 7, 14, 21 and 28, 2024 from 2pm to 8pm. The second implementation was held in celebration of the Mental Health Month of May at St. Peter Chapels Paranaque City on May 8, 15, 22 and 29, 2024 from 2pm to 8pm.

We were able to serve at least 34 clients of St. Peter Chapels together with their friends and families (see table below). Just like in regular therapy sessions, the participants were asked to complete a consent form before proceeding.

The participants either came alone, in twos or as a family of at least 4 members - including children as young as 6 years old. Arrangements were made in order to provide a safe space and create a supportive environment where the participants can freely explore and express their emotions with their family and friends, through music. Group sessions create a space where shared experiences resonate, where the melody of one mourner's heart finds harmony with the melodies of other mourners. The music therapy sessions with family members made them feel that they were not alone in their grief, and that in this shared space, they found solace and strength in each other.

Since one music therapy session only lasted 90 minutes at the most, St. Peter Chapels collaborated with Doctor Yangky to develop a music therapy session that does not only address the current feelings of the participants in a short period of time, but also, enables them to cope with and mourn the loss of a loved one in a healthy manner once they have already left our chapel premises. The first Musical Encounters Activity Sessions, which Doctor Yangky has dubbed "Coping with Loss and Change," consisted of five steps: 1) Affirming one's feelings, 2) Acknowledging one's grief over the loss of the loved one, 3) Accepting the reality of the loss, 4) Taking Action, and 5) Adjusting or adapting to one's new reality without the departed loved one. Each music therapy session followed these steps, guided by a worksheet which were given to the participants at the end of each session as their take-home reference.

While the session flow was the same for all participants, the manner by which the session was conducted varies depending on the unique personalities of the participants. Some participants were more comfortable with just listening to music while others felt the need to move and sing in order to express their pent-up emotions. To address these individual preferences, Doctor

Yangky combined the following music therapy techniques and cognitive behavior tools to effectively facilitate and discuss each step of the session.

Music therapy techniques such as 1) Passive listening or simply listening to music; 2) guided imagery - asking the participants to either visualize in their minds, or paint or draw on paper peaceful and serene images (i.e. calm waters, blue sky, etc.), while listening to relaxing music; and, 3) music-assisted memories or listening to or performing music that trigger memories of their departed loved one, were used to aid the participants to process their emotions towards the loss and initiate the journey of healing. Lyric substitution and songwriting encouraged the participants to write down their thoughts and feelings while drumming, singing, instrument playing and rhythmic movement offered healthy outlets to release suppressed emotions and foster inner resilience. Breathing techniques, meditation and self-massage were valuable coping skills which helped participants heal and manage stress, anxiety, and depression associated with grief. One of the participants was able to compose a rap song about his deceased father and shared with us the lyrics of his composition.

The Musical Encounters Activity Sessions were a success, judging from the visible signs of relaxation and emotional release that were seen from those who have participated and based on the results of the short feedback forms that the participants completed after each session. One of the participants even shared their music therapy experience to a family friend, who posted about it on Facebook.

After each session, the participants were asked to answer a short feedback form to determine if the session helped them with their grief and if they will be willing to join another music therapy session in the future. Eighty percent (80%) of the participants took part in answering the feedback form.

Seventy-five percent (75%) of the survey respondents said that the activity was very helpful in allowing them to process difficult emotions while the remaining 25% said that the activity was helpful (see Fig. 1). While in varying degrees, all survey respondents also said that the activity has provided a safe space for them to express themselves (see Fig. 2) - 67.9% said they felt extremely safe and 28.6% said they felt very safe.

Seventy one percent of respondents (71%) said that the activity utilized more than enough music and musical elements (see Fig. 3). A few of them said that other music genres could be explored and several of them wanted to have more guided exercises.

Two respondents said that the session felt too fast-paced and wanted more opportunities for sharing and discussion while 3 respondents said they would like more opportunities for individual expression.

Seventy one percent of the respondents (71%) strongly believe that music therapy can contribute to their healing journey (see Fig. 4) and 89.3% (Definitely Yes - 42.9% and Yes - 46.4%) are interested in joining another music therapy session (see Fig. 5).

In sum, the FREE MUSICAL ENCOUNTERS under the St. Peter Healing Hands program has been well-received by participants. Reviews have been most positive, indicating that the

program provided a helpful space for expression and connection during a challenging time for bereaved families, and music therapy is definitely a powerful grief therapy tool. Based on this positive feedback and as DeathCare Experts, we are committed to continuing the program in order to help more St. Peter Chapels' clients heal, move on and manage their grief.

The road to healing from grief is long and there is no remedy that can provide overnight relief. There is also no "right" way to mourn. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to healing. What matters most is that we are open to exploring different techniques, like music therapy, and finding what resonates with us the most, in order to better manage the healing journey.

-----

1. What is Music Therapy? | What is Music Therapy? | American Music Therapy Association (AMTA). (n.d.). <https://www.musictherapy.org/about/musictherapy/>
2. Professional, C. C. M. (n.d.). Music therapy. Cleveland Clinic. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/treatments/8817-music-therapy>
3. Yare, M. (2021, March 23). Music therapy – creative support for the bereaved. Leukaemia Foundation. <https://www.leukaemia.org.au/stories/music-therapy-creative-support-for-the-bereaved%E2%80%AF/>

## **Thomas McAfee Funeral Home – Downtown, Greenville, SC**

*Thomas McAfee Funeral Home – Northwest, Greenville, SC; Thomas McAfee Funeral Home – Southeast, Simpsonville, SC*

Since 2002, Thomas McAfee Funeral Home has presented an annual Grief Seminar to the community, featuring a nationally known grief educator/counselor/speaker. Dr. Harold Ivan Smith was the speaker for the seminar held on Thursday, September 28, 2023, at Brookwood Church.

Dr. Smith is a thanatologist and independent scholar. For 18 years, he served on the teaching faculty of St. Luke's Hospital in Kansas City, Missouri, where he created innovation storytelling groups for grieverers, as well as trained hospital and hospice chaplains. As a Fellow in Thanatology recognized by the Association for Death Education and Counseling, he currently conducts Celebration of Life services for Forest Lawn Mortuary in Cathedral City, California.

As a gifted "storyteller" Dr. Smith easily connects with his audience and is researching the use of "story telling" in grief resolution. Greenville, South Carolina was once known as the Textile Capital of the World. Still today, with most textile mills closed, Greenville is a blue-collar town with many people working in the manufacturing of automobiles and tires. Most families we serve come from this segment of society, and they tend to be deeply religious and conservative. This being the case, Dr. Smith and his "storytelling" make a significant impact on the attendees.

Throughout the event, there are presentations geared to various audiences. For example, professional caregivers from the community were invited to two sessions, "This Sure Isn't Your Granddaddy's Grief," as well as "What Do You Know Now That You Didn't Know You Knew Until Now?" The seminar explored new developments in theory and practice particularly in complicated and traumatic bereavement. Three hours of CEUs are available to the caregivers in attendance.

The evening seminar with is for the general public was titled "What Are You Going to Do About Your Grief? It's Your Choice." Dr. Smith invited attendees to take an honest look at their grief journey examining how it began, the circumstances surrounding it, noteworthy events that trigger grief episodes, what is and what is not working on the pathway. He then gave practical suggestions to develop a way forward. For example, "If we run from the pain, we will also be running from the love we shared."

While the seminar is of immense value and helpful to caregivers and grieverers, one of the highlights is inviting other end of life organizations to participate. This partnership is a wonderful opportunity for making professional connections within the caregiving community. Social workers, chaplains, counselors, nurses, and case managers find it beneficial to learn about the various organizations and the services offered, as well as to put a face with a name. For example, a nurse from Lutheran Hospice who knows of a caregiver having a challenging time accepting the impending death of a loved one may make a beneficial connection a counselor from Canterbury Counseling. The 2023 sponsor partners included hospice organizations, home health agencies, senior living facilities, as well as counseling services.

Another highlight of the event is the opportunity for Thomas McAfee Funeral Home staff to reconnect with families served in the past year. Often a widow or widower will express their appreciation for the care received at the time of their spouse's passing.

At the 2023 seminar, a Pursuit of Excellence exhibit was placed by the entrance to the auditorium. Managers, Samantha Kennedy, Grant Berdan, and Timothy Gossett were present to answer any questions guests may have had about the award.

Even though the annual Grief Seminar is not a new or necessarily innovative way of serving the community, it is most definitely beneficial to all who participate.