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The purpose of the funeral industry is often seen as a means of closure to one's life. While this is undoubtedly an essential component of the services provided, A Sacred Choice is committed to a holistic view of what end-of-life services mean to families and the larger community we are all connected through. As a part of that community, we are committed to creating initiatives that serve as a force for good today and for generations to come.

We believe that being an active caregiver of our community includes caring for our environment. Out of this belief, we began a project to protect and cultivate an endangered species while providing a meaningful, unique memorial option for bereaved family members.

The idea for our initiative emerged when on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the U.S. Wildlife and Fisheries Service officially classified the monarch butterfly as an endangered or threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. This classification allows for proper tracking in an effort to curb the years-long decline of the species. While monarch butterflies are indeed beautiful, their essential role in the overall ecosystem may not be as well known. Monarchs are a beautiful representation of the circle of life—they serve as both pollinators for many different plants as well as a food source for small animals, other insects, and birds.

We felt that our organization could have a role in protecting this species, so we set out by first researching the best ways to help protect the monarch population and how we might incorporate this into our business model. We found that the most viable option with the biggest impact would be for us to grow caterpillars and then release them at memorial services once they have reached their final stage of metamorphosis as adult butterflies.

We brought this plan to life by designating space to take part in the monarch butterfly cultivation process from beginning to end. Families plant seeds for milkweed plants, the natural habitat for monarch's lifecycle. They then receive 14-16 caterpillars in small cups that are typically in their third larvae stage—a few days before they reach the pupa stage. These caterpillars feed on the planted milkweed plants and pupate (or develop a chrysalis to begin their metamorphosis) within 10 days. After another 10-14 days, the beautiful adult monarch butterflies emerge.

Families can choose to take part in this beautiful representation of the enduring cycle of life. It is a meaningful, memorable experience for family and loved ones of all ages, including young children. We offer the option for families to participate on our property on multiple occasions for the full lifecycle or continue the process in the backyard of their own homes.

We are proud of the initiative's positive impact on our planet, as well as the significance it has for the families we serve. As one of our families put it, "Monarchs are beautiful when they have reached the end of their cycle, but they are even more beautiful when you're able to grow them."

Beyond benefitting the families we serve and the environment, this initiative has had a positive effect on our staff as well. Out-of-office and outdoor activities have been shown to have a wealth of benefits for employees, including fostering creativity, enhancing teamwork and communication skills, strengthening interoffice relationships, improving innovation skills, and even unveiling hidden potential. Our staff's morale has been truly enhanced by the emotional and transformational components of this project. They believe in the process and hold it as a sacred part of what they do.

We are proud to do our part to conserve the beautiful monarch butterfly and we know that this initiative will have far-reaching positive effects for our community and our planet.

The last year has been an exceedingly difficult year for all of us. For those who faced a death, it was even more difficult. The separation requirements placed on communities made the feelings of isolation all the more deeper for many who grieved the loss of a loved one. While many funeral service providers worked diligently to find creative ways to help families mourn their loss and celebrate a life, the feeling of isolation and loneliness became more apparent as traditional forms of community gatherings were on lockdown. Churches took a hiatus, Restaurants were closed, Neighborhood activities were also shuttered.

While we at Anderson Funeral and Cremation Service, complied with mandated gathering restrictions, engaged in walk-through no contact visitations, and livestreamed funeral and memorial services and gatherings; we felt an urging to continue to help those who grieve find a sense of community. A community where feelings of isolation became less...isolating. Diann Anderson, our Directional Leader at Anderson Funeral and Cremation Services became certified by the International Grief institute as a Certified Aftercare Specialist. In February, she unveiled a six week online via Zoom grief support group. This group with the motto, "Because, together we are better." Is aimed at coming together in the safety of one's home to meet via Zoom to be present and to begin the path of grief reconciliation with others who are on a similar path. I believe God designed us to live in community, to carry the burden of one another and to walk side by side in this journey we call life. This platform allowed us to bring something to our community that has been lost in the past year. It has allowed us to create community, direction, and support. We have six sessions, each aimed at a different aspect of loss but with the same tone that no one walks alone. We saw amazing connections made between individuals that attended, some of which still stay in connection. Our decision for only going six weeks was intentional. We wanted to launch our families in a matter that was self-sustaining. They would be able to make connections with people of similar loss to walk alongside one another. This platform has also opened our eyes to do similar segments based more on focused experiences. For Example, a course or session specifically for parents that have lost children or people who have lost a spouse. Our goal is to have meaningful, helpful conversations that do not just mask what we are feeling but to dig down to the roots of our grief and equip us with the tools to walk each day without our loved ones by our side. It has helped our staff to see the overall picture of the importance of the work we do and for us to carry that work even after the service. Our hope and desire is to create a network of people in our community to work and walk alongside one another. Because together we are better

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

### **The Collaboration of the Few – To Benefit the Many**

In March of 2020, when the entire nation shut down because of the COVID-19 pandemic, panic set in across the country. All non-essential entities closed and people were told to stop everything that they were doing. Stop shopping, stop going to the doctor, stop going to church, stop visiting with others, and the list goes on. The virus stopped it all ... or did it? The virus – no matter how powerful it was – could not stop grieving and mourning. People were still trying to navigate life following the death of loved ones. They were still grieving, only now their foundation, their support network had also been taken away from them. As the Grief Counselor, Patricia Monroe, knew just how important and meaningful it was for a griever to sit across from, or next to someone and be heard, to have a hand touch theirs, to give and receive a hug of comfort at the end of a visit. All of that was ripped away in an instant. In essence, it was the death of another relationship.

There were several grief organizations that immediately sprung into action. Two of them were the Hospice Foundation of America and the Order of the Golden Rule. Both of these groups have been amazing, but the collaboration that Patti was a part of was with Nancy, a member of the Order of the Golden Rule (OGR). Nancy and Patti connected in April 2020 when the OGR website advertised a telephone Grief Support Group. Patti called in to the group because she was curious about how well this format would be received by the grieving population. Well, due to a typo in an email sent out by OGR, she was the only person on the call with Nancy, who was serving as the facilitator.

Nancy and Patti spoke at first about how scary the COVID-19 virus was and how it was / or might impact them personally, and how it was / or might impact the scope of their careers as Grief Support persons. But then the call turned into a very long brainstorming session. They talked about how they might make adjustments to the things that they had already been doing in order to keep them effective and beneficial for those that were grieving. The very first thing that they spoke about was giving support to the brand-new grievers; the ones left behind as people were dying ‘right now’. Nancy and Patti discussed the importance of being available to them virtually and in spirit since they could not meet with them in person. They realized the importance of physical contact, and vowed to increase the number of physical notes and cards that would be sent to those that we were serving. Even if the griever could not be with them in person, having a card or something to physically touch would have a grounding effect.

Next, they discussed how they, as Grief Support, could give support to families that would be unable to have the traditional memorial and funeral ceremonies. One of the ways that Nancy and Patti discussed including family and friends was that of advertising the opportunities to have people send messages to the funeral home, which would be printed out and attached to helium balloons and attached to the backs of chairs in the visitation chapel. Each balloon would be representing someone that was attending ‘in spirit’.

The Order of the Golden Rule has created a service where, for a fee, funeral homes can provide access to a personalized voicemail box and can advertise that box so that family and friends that

cannot attend a visitation, memorial, or funeral can record their voice message for the family of the deceased. This program is called the Virtual Hug.

Patti was able to share information about two of the programs that we offer each year through the David C. Brown Funeral Home and the Brown Family Center. These programs are the Tree of Remembrance service and the Angel of Hope Service. Each event takes place annually and is an opportunity for friends and family to remember their loved ones, and during the Angel of Hope, specifically their children, that have died. Several changes had to occur in the development and execution of both events due to the need to follow COVID-19 protocols. Patti was able to share the agendas, planning guides, and program details for both events with Nancy.

In turn, Nancy developed an annual general memorial service for the community so that people that have experienced the death of someone special to them can gather with others that have similar experiences and begin to process the loss. Nancy shared her agenda, planning guide, and program as well. We hope to present this event within the next year.

Nancy and Patti spoke about how to most effectively offer counseling via Zoom, phone, and email or text. One thing that they both agreed about was that our clients needed something to be able to focus on while they were visiting virtually. When a client is in the office, they can focus on artwork on the walls, or a plant, or on the counselor directly. When they are meeting over the phone and those focal points aren't available, the counselor needs to make sure that the client has something upon which they can focus during the session. It was suggested that maybe a photo of their loved one might be helpful, but they decided that actually, that might have a negative effect because it might cause overwhelming distraction rather than the ability to focus. Nancy and Patti decided that a good practice would be to have the client sit by a window. If they were able to look out the window and see a tree, or something flowering, they could allow that to serve as a centering tool. One example over this past winter, a client asked her grandchildren to build and maintain a snowman outside her living room window whenever there was snow on the ground. During our phone sessions, whenever she began to feel overwhelmed, she would move her gaze to look at the snowman. It brought her pleasure to see it, and it served as a place where she could rest her mind when it became overburdened by memories and grief.

In general, the time that Nancy and Patti have spent together on the phone has been such a huge benefit for Patti, and she can only assume that Nancy would feel the same. For Patti, it has given her a lifeline to someone that shares her passion for helping the grieving. It has allowed her to share and glean ideas about how to serve them in the most normal of situations as well as during a worldwide pandemic. It is true that the collaboration of the few, Nancy and Patti, will serve the many, the greater Belleville community, and everyone that interacts with Nancy through the Order of the Golden Rule (OGR).



### ***PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE – Category 1F (Essay)***

The past fifteen months have been difficult for everyone, but it has been especially hard for those who have lost someone during the COVID-19 Pandemic, whether the loss was directly due to COVID-19 or the celebration of their loved one's loss was restricted by precautions put into effect for the protection of the general public.

Considering people have grieved differently during this time, Finch & Finch Funeral & Cremation Service decided we should host a seminar entitled "*Dealing With Death During A Pandemic*". We partnered with First Baptist Church of Altavista and the GriefShare support group they sponsor locally.

GriefShare seminars and support groups are led by people who understand what families and individuals are going through and want to help. Participants gain access to valuable GriefShare resources to help one recover from their loss and look forward to rebuilding their life. GriefShare is a friendly, caring group of people who will walk alongside those as they pass through one of life's most difficult experiences.

The staff of Finch & Finch has benefitted through a better understanding of how our client families have and will navigate through their journey of grief during a global pandemic and possible future epidemics or pandemics.

Trey Finch (Vice President and CFSP) of Finch & Finch Funeral & Cremation Service is joined by Alice Bond of First Baptist Church and coordinator for their GriefShare program.

Our community knows grief is very painful and disruptive. It has always been the case that in the early days, weeks, and longer it was hard to sleep, hard to focus, and coping with it all seemed impossible. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we knew the grieving process would be made more difficult, but we didn't know how, or how long it would last. More than a year later, it has been far worse than we could have imagined. Being without the usual supports that we take for granted was like having the rug pulled out from under us. So many things that usually happen immediately, people appearing at our homes with hugs, words of sympathy and support, comfort food, and offers of help. Close friends and family would arrive from near and far to be with us. Someone would help plan for family gatherings. All that changed in March, 2020.


This was obviously our main focus during these times. Adapting the best we could, drive-in funerals, virtual meetings, recording and webcasting services to cleaning and installing a charged ION system to have safer and healthier air in the building, to mention just a few.

When we lose someone by death, it leaves a hole in our lives. With a long illness, we have time to at least think about what it would be like without them. With sudden, unexpected deaths, as with a heart attack or accidental death, the shock makes it all seem unreal. But then came COVID-19. Even when the person we love dies of something besides COVID-19, there were/are not the usual support systems in place. Little did we know in mid-March 2020, such profound changes were in our future. It's important to understand that the absence of the usual ways we get through a loss of someone we love is yet another loss. The rituals we had taken for granted help us accept the reality of the death, which is the first step in the grief journey, and adapting to all the changes ahead.

Hopefully, with seminars such as this one, we will continue to assist those who lost someone during the pandemic to begin transitioning back to "normal" while they continue their grief journey, and assist in ridding themselves of "survivor's guilt".

We have posted the forum video to our website and to our Facebook page as to reach as many of our community and beyond as possible.

You may view our "Dealing With Death During A Pandemic" seminar by visiting our website at <https://www.finchandfinchfuneralservice.com/grief-and-healing/> or visit our FaceBook page.

Signature 

Title *President*

Date *6/23/2024*

**San Vicente Funeral Home: Committed to Mental Health and Suicide Prevention**

**The COVID-19 pandemic has caused loss, suffering and stress. Focusing on suicide prevention is especially important now, in order to stay connected to each other and to be aware of the signs of suicide risk and how to respond. Even in these times of increased physical distance, people can maintain social connections and take care of their mental health.**

**Pan American Health Organization**

**Rationale behind the idea**

Since 50 years ago, when San Vicente Funeral Home was founded, its main institutional objectives have been oriented towards the commitment to offer dignified and high quality funeral services, regardless of race, creed or economic position. As a company aware of its social responsibility in dealing with such a sensitive issue as death, it has been willing and attentive to provide support at times when our community has required it, accompanying victims in cases of natural disasters, terrorist attacks and accidents; making donations for people without resources who cannot afford a funeral to say goodbye to their loved ones; and carrying out awareness campaigns on the preservation of life and health.

For these reasons, 23 years ago it created the Grief Counselling Center: the first institution in the country specialising in medical and psychological support for bereaved people. Free of charge and open to the entire community, this Center offers comfort to hundreds of people every month through its services. These consist of: support groups (perinatal, Covid, parents who have lost children, widows and widowers, suicide, the elderly, children and mixed groups), the institutional conference "Getting over the death of a loved one" (given on Saturdays every eight days), and individual consultation.

Of all these services, the suicide group has been of particular importance to the work of the Grief Counselling Center, not only because it offers support to the bereaved, but also because many people who have had suicidal thoughts or even attempted suicide find a safe place to talk about their feelings and their desire to die.

According to PAHO/WHO (n.d.), more than 800,000 people die each year by suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15-29 year olds in the Americas (although it can occur at any age), which has a devastating impact on families, friends and communities. Furthermore, there are indications that for every adult who commits suicide, possibly more than 20 others attempt it (1). In recent studies conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization stated in a press release (17 June 2021) that 1 in every 100 deaths is caused by suicide and that it is one of the leading causes of death worldwide. Furthermore, although there has been a reduction in the suicide rate worldwide over the last 20 years, this is not the case in the Americas, which saw an increase of 17% over the same period (2). It is for this reason that San Vicente Funeral Home and its Grief Counselling Center, understanding suicide as an important public health problem serves to implement prevention strategies to reduce these figures and support the bereaved.

### **Detailed description of the program**

**Suicide bereavement support group: (family members/bereaved and people with suicidal thoughts or who have attempted suicide).**

For more than 20 years, the Grief Counselling Center has been offering the bereaved and non-bereaved community a support group for people affected by suicide. In this weekly space, coordinated by the clinical psychologist of the Grief Counselling Center, Julián Cardona, attendees can talk about the feelings that the death of their loved one by suicide has generated in them, acquire tools for dealing with their grief and receive the emotional support of their peers. Suicide, being a stigmatised form of death, often generates shame in people who go through this grief and therefore avoid talking about it, fearing that they will be judged or even blamed for what happened. For this reason, the support group acts as a safe place free from criticism and prejudice to express themselves openly (see annex n°1). They also work as a group to find alternatives to the pain they experience.

### **Course - "Suicide: a comprehensive view."**

In 2014, psychologists Diana Peláez and Diana Orozco (Q.E.P.D) offered a training course for professionals - "Suicide: a comprehensive view" - which dealt with suicide prevention and support for mourners. The course offered tools for psychological first aid and crisis intervention, as well as strategies for dealing with the death of someone by suicide. This course was developed in 11 sections with an hourly intensity of 22 hours and the topics covered were:

- Contextualisation of suicide.
- Suicide as a way of dying.
- Beliefs about suicide based on a questionnaire designed by the Grief Counselling Center (see appendix 2).
- Risk factors.
- Protection factors.
- Suicide and the family.
- Grief and suicide

## **World Suicide Prevention Day Campaigns**

Aware of the importance of reaching the greatest number of people who could benefit from information on suicide prevention, and on the occasion of World Suicide Prevention Day celebrated in September, the Grief Counselling Center of Funeraria San Vicente carries out campaigns that include cine-forums, dissemination through newsletters and lectures via Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/unidadeduelosanvicente/photos/1239862796349866>) and YouTube ([https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEq\\_GqIHQh0mJuo84hEQaZw/playlists](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEq_GqIHQh0mJuo84hEQaZw/playlists))

## **Benefits provided to the funeral company and its staff**

Suicide as a public health problem affects even funeral service employees, who can also experience suicidal thoughts, the loss of a loved one by suicide, and even attempt suicide themselves. Having a suicide support group and conducting internal and extramural prevention campaigns offers funeral home employees the opportunity to be listened to, destigmatised and accompanied through their feelings of anguish and despair which are sometimes generated by their ongoing work with death and grief. It is sometimes thought that those who work in funeral homes are immune to suffering and that their relationship with life is more "positive". However, the opposite may be true: being constantly in contact with death can generate a certain "familiarity", which trivialises the act of dying by suicide. For this reason, the suicide prevention campaigns carried out by San Vicente Funeral Home are not only for the wider community, but also for employees and their families, with their mental health and well-being in mind. In the same way, having a permanent group of care for mourners and guidance in relation to suicidal thoughts provides the employees of San Vicente Funeral Home with a tool to respond to the needs of users who require it, making their work more comprehensive and compassionate.

## **Benefits provided to families and/or the wider community**

For San Vicente Funeral Home, thinking of the welfare of mourners with the firm intention of expanding its commitment and social and human responsibility, the implementation of the Grief Counselling Center in the portfolio of services for its affiliates and the community in general has a clear justification. This consists of a space aimed at providing care (focused, immediate and specialised), monitoring, surveillance and facilitation of the entire recovery process when a loved one has been lost.

Hence, the service of psychological accompaniment in the funeral service context arises from the need of mourners to be listened to and emotionally supported in the process of mourning the loss of a loved one. According to a PAHO article published in 2020 (1):

Despite an increase in research and knowledge about suicide and its prevention, the stigma surrounding it persists and those who need help often do not seek it, feeling alone in the face of risk. Even when people do seek help, the fact is that many health services do not provide it. The challenge is real and must be met. (n.d.).

Psychological intervention in bereavement also fosters a culture of dealing with grief and death in society, issues that have traditionally been taboo and distorted in their approach, which has prevented their understanding and acceptance even though they occur naturally in the life cycle.

In the case of suicide, the Grief Counselling Center of San Vicente Funeral Home offers a range of support services: postvention (psychological accompaniment of mourners who lose loved ones to suicide); fundamental prevention (educating in relation to death and grieving); primary prevention (encouraging the person to address their grief); secondary prevention (early detection of complicated grief); and tertiary prevention (follow-up of people in long-term mourning that lasts years and of those who suffer lifelong consequences).

The historical constant from a socio-cultural point of view has been the stigmatisation and rejection of suicide, which has prevented a better understanding and approach to addressing this phenomenon. The professional service provided by the Grief Counselling Center of San Vicente Funeral Home in terms of unconditional professional accompaniment (psychiatric and psychological) to those grieving the loss of someone to suicide, and the referral to primary care in the hospital network of people with suicidal tendencies who have received prior individual psychological care, makes it a centre for the promotion of mental health that contributes to a high degree to the mitigation of suicidal risk and to the

demystification and destigmatisation of suicide in order to better understand, evaluate, treat and address it. This, in addition to the fact that it is an accessible, specialised and free service, allows a large part of the community, regardless of their economic condition, to receive care in both instances (prevention and postvention).

Furthermore, working on suicide (bereavement and behavioural prevention) is undoubtedly a contribution to the mental health of society. Through the strategies it has implemented for professional care (support group, individual and group psychological care, psychiatric care, external conferences for all types of public, advice to groups, families and institutions) the Grief Counselling Center has contributed to addressing suicidal behaviour in the following ways:

- Offering initial psychological help in a practical and humane way to support people in situations of suicidal crisis, as a situation connected to the treatment of bereavement.
- Enabling those affected by suicide (bereavement and suicidal tendencies) not to be stigmatised and rejected, but to be integrated and welcomed in a service where there is familiarity, understanding and respect for them.
- Validating the expression of emotions (and helping to regulate them) that are specifically associated with suicide such as guilt, shame, anger, feelings of abandonment, helplessness and sadness.
- Providing a non-judgemental space to discuss all that suicide arouses in the inner world of those who have been affected either because their loved ones committed suicide or show signs of suicidal behaviour (thoughts, threats to commit suicide, and actual attempts to commit suicide).
- Educating and informing the community, when they are affected by suicide in their immediate environment (family, company, school), about how to access specific professional care according to the situation.
- Promoting support groups, solidarity, understanding and recovery of the bereaved and those who feel suicidal and are used to experiencing rejection, judgement and moral censure in their usual contexts.

## **BEING MEXICAN IS AN EXAMPLE OF PRIDE, HOSPITALITY AND SUPPORT.**

In Mexico we have a culture rich in traditions and values, we are known for our love of family and union. We always acknowledge those people who have given us life lessons and we pay tribute to those who have left their mark on our history. We grow up believing in solidarity; our history has taught us that we can overcome even the most adverse situations; that supporting and caring for those who find themselves in a vulnerable position makes us better people and therefore better Mexicans. The working class of our country strives every day to provide their families with the best possible conditions, although sometimes life can be uncertain, and for this reason it is important to promote a culture of prevention.

Death makes us aware of how special our life is and although in Mexico there is a unique relationship with it, we are not immune to the pain that the loss of a loved one can bring us. And it is in the light of this situation that it becomes even more necessary to talk about death not only as part of our folklore but also as a reality that sooner or later we will encounter. Talking about our mortality can help people to go through the loss process in a slightly softer way, to know the wishes of our loved ones for the day of their departure, to anticipate procedures and paperwork so that this situation is less overwhelming and thus avoid making hasty decisions, especially when the death occurs unexpectedly.

As a society we have lived through an unprecedented transformation since the appearance of the SARS CoV-2 virus, this disease has challenged us in all aspects of our lives; daily activities have become more relevant in the way we protect ourselves and take care of our family, go out to work with uncertainty to ensure their sustenance, provide comfort and company to our loved ones without being able to be physically with them and work within ourselves every day to preserve our strength to move forward, these are values of resilience and resistance that portray us as a society. This past year is synonymous with a challenge for everyone, marking a precedent in the life history of thousands of families who lost their loved ones and who, as a result of the mortality of the SARS CoV-2 virus did not have the opportunity to give them a last farewell they would have wished, a farewell worthy of the experiences that this person gave them by becoming part of their lives.

Despite the fear generated worldwide for this situation, our industry dignified its work and its commitment to all families who unfortunately suffered invaluable losses, this commitment was shown 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and has been present throughout this time to ensure as funeral professionals, peace of mind and the best possible care to families affected by this pandemic.

Every member of **FUNENZA** family is aware of the importance of our work. Honoring and celebrating the lives of thousands of Mexicans is a great commitment that we assume every day with pride and with the great responsibility that this has represented for the past 26 years, showing solidarity and providing support to more than 1,000 families through the donation of comprehensive funeral services provided by us. We join the challenge of our industry, which has consisted of the need to reformulate and dignify the impression of service and vocation to society through a professional accompaniment in all stages involving the loss of a loved one, so in **FUNENZA** we have generated a project that seeks to connect with families and leave a mark in a positive tone through memorable experiences, providing certainty and valuable information, through specialists who care for the emotional well-being of our customers before, during and after the loss of their loved one.

**Our objective is to contribute comprehensively to the thanatological education and accompaniment of all Mexican families, transforming the image of the funeral industry through 3 pillars of attention:**

**1: Bereavement education and sharing of information.**

We are working on the development of tools that provide peace of mind and certainty, we have developed valuable information through articles and advice from specialists, which allow us to educate families on the subject of prevention, so that they can consider the necessary emotional counseling and paperwork when faced with the potential death of a loved one.

**2: Counseling and Support.**

Each life is unique, special and memorable, we understand the importance of having the support of specialists who care for the needs of the families who trust our services. Our philosophy is based on allowing people to cope with their process and provide them with accompaniment with human sense through a quality service, seeking to go through this process of pain and turn it into a lasting tribute.

As part of the industry, it is our duty to contribute to mortuary education in Mexico through an ethical and professional service in fair conditions for families. A new challenge we have faced with this new normality is to provide an opportunity for families who due to security measures, did not have the possibility to say goodbye to their loved one according to their wishes and beliefs, and for them we have designed special ceremonies to assimilate this process and give them a last farewell.

**3: Help and Wellness.**

Our philosophy is based on our commitment to Mexican families who have lost a loved one in their lives. Each person goes through the process of saying farewell in a different way; therefore, in collaboration with specialists, we have designed tools for guidance and information that allow us to help with the process through psychological support based on thanatology and methodological guidelines.

Our digital community includes more than 9,000 people to whom we provide information every month through special contents by seasonality.

At **FUNNEZA** we are families serving and helping families , committed to provide peace of mind, trust and support to all people, always providing our support with a respectful treatment, aware that our high level of commitment is what will allow us to make a difference in such a sensitive process as the loss of a loved one, providing tributes of life to every father, mother, children and family member who have left an impression in the life of their loved ones.

I-Basic Requirements

F- Innovative Program Essay

For 11 years now, our 4-legged friends have been roaming the halls and chapels of our three funeral homes. Their morning routine starts like ours, getting ready for work! Once their service vests go on, they know playtime is over and their workday starts by comforting those in need.

The idea for this K9 Grief therapy program came to me after talking to a long time friend, Kevin Knartzer, Director of Training and Client Services at Paws & Think. One day, Kevin stopped by our funeral home with Lady, a golden retriever he had been working with. A family was leaving the funeral home, after planning the services of their father/grandfather. Once they saw Lady they were able to smile and focus their attention on her instead of the loss of their loved one. I was amazed by the “power of the pup” and knew right then I had to incorporate them into our everyday lives here at G.H. Herrmann Funeral Homes. The next day we adopted Lady and from there the program was born!

Our staff sees first hand that the presence of our pups has a healing affect on hearts of all ages. It is proven that dogs can help reduce agitation in patients with dementia. The American Heart Association has found that a 12-minute visit with a dog helped lower blood pressure in healthy and hypertensive patients; as well as decreasing anxiety in hospitalized patients. Something about interacting with a dog makes most people feel better! Not only do our furry friends help comfort our families who are mourning, they are also there for our directors and staff to help cheer them up after an emotional day.

Sadly, on November 20, 2020 we had to say goodbye to our sweet Bubsie. He crossed the rainbow bridge almost 2 years exactly that we lost our Jax. They comforted many families during their lifetime with us. When Jax passed away, we were blessed with Libby and it took a while to find the perfect fit, but we now have our playful pup Winston learning the ropes! He is adjusting well to his new routine and has also made an appearance at Anew Hospice.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, we weren't sure what that meant for the therapy dog program. Unfortunately we chose to give our fur babies a little “fur”lough with some time off work. Our families would often request to have them present for the kids at small visitations and burials, when this was not possible we took advantage of technology with a zoom visit set up by their handler! Although this wasn't as fun as being able to pet and cuddle them, it seemed to provide the comfort they needed. Luckily, we now have been able to bring them back into our locations to meet with families in person!

Life here at G.H. Herrmann would not be the same without our favorite furry friends! They always put a smile on our faces as well as the families we serve. Besides, they are some of our best employees. They work for Kibbles and Bits and they never complain about overtime! Woof!!!

I-Basic Requirements

F- Innovative Program Essay

Thank you for consideration!

Jeff N Herrmann

President of G.H. Herrmann Funeral Homes

Founder of The Gardens at Olive Branch Cemetery

Creator of The G.H. Herrmann K9 Grief Therapy Program



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*Tisdale Funeral Home*



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Heritage Funeral Home Ltd. is located in Nipawin, Saskatchewan. Nipawin consist of a population of 4500, surrounded by smaller communities of 100-200 residents. Nipawin and area are known for their agricultural and tourism economy.

As 2020 and 2021 has evolved, a number of events, if not all of the events that Heritage has to offer the community were postponed/cancelled due to COVID Pandemic restrictions. In some cases, we were able to modify our services so we could reach out to our families while still following provincial protocols.

One example is our Grief Support Sessions which came to a halt in 2020. Instead, our aftercare team, Linda Peterson and Rosa Matiasz, have spent more time reaching out to our families by telephone. They each have a different list of individuals to phone. Their phone calls are actually a blessing to so many. They have brought comfort, assurance, and so much care to all that they have reached out to. Many just need someone to listen to them and our aftercare team has been incredible at being there for those in need. Both ladies have reported that some of the phone calls may be up to an hour long. As their conversations draw to and end, the ladies ask if the person would like another follow-up call.

Linda and Rosa have received an overwhelming response to their phone visits and follow-up calls. They have found that many individuals are struggling not only with the loss of their loved ones, but also with the isolation and loneliness that has resulted from the Pandemic. The fear of the unknown and all the restrictions placed upon us can become overwhelming at times. Many times, family and friends think they are helping but might in fact be doing the opposite to the person who is hurting. It is comforting to receive a call from someone who is not a relative or a close friend, but a person who is willing to listen without judgement and an open mind.

This aftercare team at Heritage has an open heart, they express empathy and patience, and allow an individual to share their inner feelings. When the aftercare team member calls, they assure the person that their conversation with remain confidential. These ladies have formed many strong friendships through these calls.

To many, this may not mean a lot, but for the lonely, grieving people who have few to turn to, it is truly a blessing.

As the owner of Heritage Funeral Home Ltd., I am very proud of my Aftercare Team for reaching out not once, but numerous times to the families that we have served. This practise will continue long after COVID restrictions have been lifted as we have found this to be so rewarding for everyone.

“Grief isn’t something you get over. It’s something you go through.” – Alan Pedenen

As funeral service professionals, we are called to help the bereaved of their grief journey. Several years ago, we decided to begin offering Grief Support Groups and 1-on-1 Grief Support to our community. When Cason and Kim went to their certification training the first thing they learned is that everyone’s journey through grief is unique. So, in these sessions they are not going to say things like, “we know how you feel,” because they simply don’t. Neither does anyone else. What they are there to do is provide a safe environment where people on their grief journey are given specific tools to help them recover from loss and ultimately lead a happier life.

I want you to think back over your lifetime and recall every loss you have suffered. Those losses could be the death of a pet, a move, divorce, declining health, the loss of a job, or, of course, the loss of a loved one. What we, as a society, need to understand is that grief is a normal and natural reaction to a loss of any kind. When we neglect our feelings and don’t deal with our grief it is like taking a rock and throwing it into a backpack that we are carrying. Once we have suffered several losses that backpack starts to get heavy and can become debilitating as we try to move through life. However, it might not be all the rocks in the backpack that stop us in our tracks. It could easily be the small pebble that gets into our shoe that brings us to our knees. That one small and unexpected loss could easily be our undoing. But now we are on the ground, and we have a lot of extra weight on our back from all the other losses we have neglected and thrown in our backpack. This analogy is what inspired our project at the conclusion of our support groups.

At the end of the 13-week program each participant is given a little rock that represents their Short-Term Energy-Relieving Behavior (STERB), a behavior that they may have been using to escape the pain caused by their loss. Examples of this behavior are food, alcohol, anger, isolation, workaholism, etc. Graduates of the program will throw this rock into the woods. Then participants are given a bigger rock. This rock symbolizes the loss that they have recovered from, and participants will paint this rock to memorialize their lost loved one.

The beautiful part of all of this is that we have now created a rock garden. It is a wonderful and colorful place where you can truly begin to see the change and recovery that is happening in our community.

# Myers

## MORTUARY AND CREMATION SERVICES



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Category I: Basic Requirements  
Criteria F: Essay

### Virtual Good Grief

The death of a loved one is life's most painful event. People's reactions to death remain one of society's least understood and most off-limits topics for discussion. Often grieverers are left totally alone in dealing with their pain, loneliness, and isolation.

Richard and Gloria Myers started a grief support group 46 years ago in 1975 to help individuals who are experiencing grief and loss feel like they are not alone in the struggle to continue on in life without their missing loved one. They called the support group, "Good Grief". Good Grief because going thru the grief process is good for the mind and soul after experiencing a loss.

Covid-19 came on so quickly in our area that Myers Mortuary shut down some of our long-standing programs and support efforts in the hope that we could find ways to continue providing the necessary support for grieving individuals while still keeping the public safe from the virus.

"Virtual Good Grief", was our solution to keep everyone who wanted to attend, safe while still providing the grief support connection our community so desperately needs. Our Good Grief support group has always met at a local library central for everyone in the neighboring three counties to attend. The problem we had was local event numbers were limited by the State of Utah for attendance in person; and in person meetings is what our community was yearning for. In order to facilitate the state's requirements, Myers was going to need the help of all four of our Myers locations. We set up a Zoom meeting for our Good Grief support Group and encouraged the community who wanted to attend in person to sign up ahead of time with Myers Mortuary at our locations in Ogden, Roy, Brigham City and Layton because seating would be limited at each location. Those wanting to still be safe and not attend in person could still participate in the Zoom meeting virtually.

Our funeral directors at all four locations set up video, sound, computer and lighting equipment in preparation for the Virtual Good Grief meeting. We wanted the meeting to be interactive as it always has been in the past because sharing your thoughts and feelings about your struggle with grief are important to the healing process. On the night of our first event, our funeral directors became the moderators at each location to help funnel questions to the presenter to give everyone a chance to be heard and share their experience with grief and loss. It was a successful event with over 80 participants either in attendance physically or virtually. After the meeting was concluded, guests and participants could partake of prepackaged light refreshments at all four of our locations and mingle while social distancing in the buildings.

We as funeral directors never thought of ourselves as videographers or production crews but we are great at adapting to our surroundings and to families' and community needs. The Virtual Good Grief series can continue to flourish and help those struggling with grief. Now that we have and know the technology exists, Virtual Grief support will never go away.

*(Documentation Attached)*

*The Funeral Directors Who Care*

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**F. SUBMIT AN ESSAY DESCRIBING AN INNOVATIVE PROGRAM, SERVICE OR ACTIVITY EXECUTED BY YOUR FUNERAL HOME. (YOU ARE ENCOURAGED TO DESCRIBE A PROGRAM/SERVICE OTHER THAN A PERSONALIZED FUNERAL SERVICE.) THE ESSAY MUST BE A MINIMUM OF 400 WORDS AND WILL BE USED TO DETERMINE RECIPIENTS OF THE BEST OF THE BEST AWARD, RICHARD MYERS PINNACLE AWARD, AND CERTIFICATE OF HONORABLE MENTION.**

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In Ann Arbor, Michigan, where our family funeral homes are located, there are over 50 Little Free Libraries set up and maintained by local residents and businesses. None of which are dedicated to grief-specific books for adults and children- that is, until summer 2021. Nie Family Funeral Home erected a Little Free Grief Library which houses books of various authors and titles about death, grief, and the healing journey.

Our team thought the Little Free Grief Library would be an interactive way to continue to support community members while they navigate the grieving process. The Library is set up off of a walking path along our funeral home property so that it is discrete and intentionally away from the hustle of the business and parking lot. In researching different Little Free Library styles- we decided to purchase the Composite Two Story Arched Library from LittleFreeLibrary.com. This style spoke to us as it is created out of eco-friendly and recycled materials, such as milk jugs, and will last for years without any maintenance. As it is made out of recycled materials there is no worry of books being damaged from water or termites bugs.

Our staff members took great care in hand selecting books for children to read which give a gentle explanation of death, dying, and missing those who have died. Some of these titles include: *The Memory Box: A Book About Grief* by Joanna Rowland and Thea Baker; *Ida, Always* by Caron Levis; *When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death* by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown.

Staff members made sure to include adults books that explored a variety of grief situations and relationships that include: *A Time to Grieve: Meditations for Healing After the Death of a Loved One* by Carol Staudacher; *Widow To Widow: Thoughtful, Practical Ideas For Rebuilding Your Life* by Genevieve Davis Ginsburg; *The Adult Orphan Club: How I Learned to Grieve the Loss of My Parents* by Flora Baker.



Our team was particularly pleased to see that the very day that the Little Free Grief Library was set up we had a family sorting through the available books during an evening visitation. As families find help with the options available our team will make sure to keep book titles in stock for the next family in need. We hope that offering 24/7 access to books that focus on a healthy understanding of death and grief will help community members as they work through their own healing journeys.



Posey Funeral Directors, North Augusta, SC

Care and comfort are primary goals of both reputable hospices and funeral service providers. Posey Funeral Directors has found that partnering with local hospices, even and especially amidst a global pandemic, creates an effective continuum of communication and care to span well before and beyond the final goodbyes.

Nearly 10 years ago, Trinity Hospice's chaplain, Dexter Lambert, and Posey Funeral Director's Melissa Posey Loose began talking about the need for grief support in their area after a funeral service. While a few area churches had counselling programs and a grief support group here or there, no organization in the area seemed to be offering a consistent option for individuals who had experienced the loss of a loved one. Meeting to brainstorm in an empty cottage on the Posey campus, Chaplain Lambert and Melissa decided that that space would be perfect for an intimate support gathering, not requiring people to re-enter the funeral home where they last said goodbye to their loved ones. So, the pair decided to start to build their new program idea by initially sending letters to families served by Trinity and/or Posey Funeral Directors with a number to call for interested parties to sign up. They also decided that the group should be a no-cost-to-attendee program, kept to no more than 12 people, and structured by the use of a curriculum that Lambert had experience with through former pastoral assignments. Within just a few weeks, a full group with a waiting list was established, and the group started on its 13-week journey of supporting each other.

Many years later and despite an international pandemic, the group has continued to grow from one group of 12 to at least three groups (8-12 members each) meeting each week. Several participants have felt so supported by the groups that they have trained and become hospice volunteers or grief support group facilitators. The whole community now is invited to participate through invitation letters, paid advertisements, and notifications in local church bulletins. Registration is completed on the Posey website. Other seminars are being held in conjunction with these, including a "Loss of Spouse" seminar held now prior to each support group session to introduce the program format and garner interest in attendance at weekly group sessions.

At the height of the pandemic in the Winter of 2020, virtual meeting and resource viewing options were offered to interested families, and the "Loss of Spouse" seminar was webcast and stored on the Posey website for later viewing. The need for additional administrative and facilitator help was evident, though, with the additional demands of the pandemic. So, the partnership of the two organizations came through again, with community hospice volunteers joining with Posey to make phone calls, organize registrations, and assemble toolkits for participants. This best practice of further integration of hospice volunteers working with Posey staff will continue, as it has made the support program more smoothly function and address the needs of participants. Additionally, during the pandemic, all who registered to attend the "Loss of Spouse" seminar and/or the weekly support groups were sent curriculum workbooks specific to the seminar and groups so that they could follow along from the comfort of their virtual viewing space. These new practices, birthed during COVID only through this partnership, were healthy outcomes that have strengthened our processes and diversified our support offerings. We continue to receive feedback from participants that they have felt such a

Posey Funeral Directors, North Augusta, SC

personal touch, with the additional people now making follow-up phone calls and watching attendance for attendees. If someone misses a session or a seminar for which they've registered, they know that his or her absence is noticed by the communication they receive from a support volunteer or staff member.

Neighborly behavior has always been a "win-win," especially amongst small business owners, government leaders, and charitable organizations. They are part of the foundation of a community, so weaving a tapestry of trust based on integrity is paramount to the strength and success of the community's culture. There is no better place to see the evidence of this than in the end-of-life care service sector where partnership not only fosters "good will" but also can lengthen the continuum of care, especially when unexpected economic and healthcare challenges arise. Posey Funeral Directors has found that joining hospice and funeral service together to compliment and carry on the work of care and compassion continues to be an opportunity by which all benefit, effectively supporting individuals and families, the beating hearts of the communities in which we live.