

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

Strengthening Perspectives

The past year our Bereavement Program, we call it Perspectives, has been reviewed and renewed. While Perspectives is long established and has been found to be beneficial by the families we serve and the wider community, a newer bereavement counselor and slow emergence from COVID offered us the opportunity to review our programs. We looked at how we may companion anew in these changing times. We polished, adjusted and added a new bereavement session. We believe these changes strengthen and evolve the group sessions and better serve the individuals involved, as well as their families and the community at large.

The multi-faceted programs of Perspectives assist anyone in the community who has suffered a recent loss as they move through their individual grief journey. Led by Linda Dzabanski LLMSW, MSW, the foundation of Perspectives has long been The Take Time to Heal group sessions. More recently, the two-hour Healing Begins workshops were added. This enables those who do not have the time or are reluctant to be part of the longer Take Time to Heal to have a taste and get a start on their journey. The most recent evolution to Perspectives is the addition of the On-Going groups. To address the different needs some people have as they grieve, among all the different session-types, there are also dedicated group sessions for those who have lost a child and those who have lost a loved one to overdose, dangerous behavior or suicide.

After conducting sessions online for over a year, The Take Time to Heal Bereavement Group returned to in-person meetings in September of 2021. With this return, The Take Time to Heal format was reorganized. The long-standing six-week schedule of the grief group sessions was shortened to five weeks. The first week introduces the group to The Take Time to Heal agenda and to each other and to their recent loss. There is also time to begin writing stories where participants introduce who they are and who they lost. In addition, they identify safe people and safe places for grief and plan on how to rely on the people and places. The second session looks at how the brain works during grief and participants begin to share their stories. No new members join after this session. The third week introduces grief stages, sharing continues and directions are shared for the final story. The fourth week participants learn about coping tools and begin sharing the story of how they would like their loved one to be remembered. The final week continues with the second stories, photos are shared, and more coping tools and resources are shared. Next steps are also discussed, and participants are invited to attend the On-Going groups.

For the groups with special interests, this structure is flexible to meet their particular needs. If we identify a need to add an additional group, we will do that.

This past year, twelve Take Time to Heal 5-week sessions were offered. After many years of only evening sessions, there are now Take Time to Heal sessions in the afternoon also. While most of the sessions are for anyone who has recently lost a loved one, two sessions focused on those who have lost a child and one focused on those who have lost a loved one to overdose, dangerous behavior or suicide. Offering these specific themes enables those dealing with these types of losses to meet with others similarly struggling, inviting them to create support more specific to their needs. Throughout the year, about 120 people attended the Take Time to Heal sessions.

The Healing Begins workshop introduces participants to the grieving process and group work. Three general workshops and one for those who have lost a child were offered. Throughout the year, forty-two people attended these. Most participants continued on with a Take Time to Heal session.

Added this year are the On-going groups. Participants who complete the Take Time to Heal series are invited to attend one of the two groups. One is for those who have lost a spouse, which meets twice monthly, on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month. Participants in the On-Going Spousal Loss group find the meetings very beneficial. They comment that the support and deeper discussions that

come with time in the on-going groups has helped them stabilize themselves. They have found both the safe people and safe place that are discussed in the early Take Time to Heal sessions. They have developed new friendships and a support system, they are learning how to be single with others settling into singlehood. Many are at different stages, some having lost their spouse a year ago and others more recently, and they are encouraging one another along their journey. They are companioning each other. Topics vary for each meeting. Linda prepares a topic, some at the suggestion of a previous meeting. If a topic emerges during check-in that sparks interest, they will also go with that. There have been two speakers, one from the Area Agency on Aging that discussed their services and volunteer opportunities. The other was our Advanced Funeral Planner, who shared the benefits of planning ahead. There will be additional speakers.

Typically, about 15 people attend each meeting and there are about 30 regulars. The current participants are very diverse. Participants are currently evenly split between men and women. They are of different religious and cultural backgrounds and different economic circumstances. They range in age from 40s to 90s.

In the Spring, as the weather was warming up, participants were spending more time in the parking lot after, chatting. This has led to many having lunch after. Others are socializing outside of the group schedule.

The second On-Going group is for those who have lost a child. This group has met monthly since November, on the first Monday of the month. This group trends younger, often with a couple coming together. This group shares a different kind of heartbreak, and they too are moving through it together. Topics are identified in similar ways, and often the prompt of what does a good day look like and what does a bad day look like get the conversation going.

We are partnering with Lutheran Church of the Master in Troy, Michigan for the On-Going groups. The groups meet at the church, enabling them to meet away from the funeral home. Offering more flexibility in its space, the church is centrally located within the communities that we serve, in a familiar and convenient area. There is no religious component to the groups.

Finally, COVID underlies the grieving process no matter how the death occurred. Most everyone spent the last two years more isolated and without many of the celebrations and support that mark life's transitions. Perspectives participants are mourning these losses too. Linda pays close attention to this in all her discussions, allowing and inviting space for participants to talk about this.

We are excited about the evolution of all the group sessions of Perspectives. Participants continue to engage, and feedback is positive. We are learning to companion more effectively, just as the group participants are companioning one another. This is now a stronger and refreshed program we continue to be proud of.

**Alderson-Ford Funeral Homes, Inc.
Cheshire, Connecticut**

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

The program is intended for those who have had a recent or previous loss and are having difficulty coping. It is facilitated by a Certified Grief Counselor from the Academy of Grief Counseling, Robert "Bob" Havens, MSHS, GC-C. The funeral home offers the bereavement support group at no charge to the participants who meet at a neutral location, such as a library or senior center, as opposed to returning to the funeral home after their loss. The ideal range of participants is from 8-12 attending.

Our first session was scheduled to meet May 12, 2022 at the Whittemore Library in Naugatuck, CT, but unfortunately due to low attendance at that venue, the program was cancelled. We quickly regrouped and contacted the Cheshire Senior Center in Cheshire, CT, as an alternate venue and new dates beginning July 14- Sept. 1, 2022 (Thursdays) from 10:00 am – 11:30 am were established. The facilitator has personally spoken to and registered a minimum of 9 participants thus far for the Cheshire Senior Center venue. It is important to mention that the facilitator does screen each call to make sure that the group is appropriate for the participant; if it is not, Counselor Havens does recommend to the individual more suitable grief resources and groups.

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

Our funeral home is under the understanding that other local funeral homes are not offering such involved grief support programs to the community. We are choosing a more progressive role in the field of aftercare, and for our time, and relatively little expense, the benefits for others is worth our efforts.

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

LOVE, LOSS, LEGACY
A Fundraiser and Grief Workshop Series for Bereaved Families

"We bereaved are not alone. We belong to the largest company in all the world—the company of those who have known suffering." - Helen Keller

Grief, much like love, is a thing that binds us all. It is humanity's collective gift and burden: to love, to experience loss, and to love just the same. Left ignored or unexpressed, grief can leave us in a place of pain, with a feeling of helplessness, or worse, with a heart that feels it may never recover. Even for those in the funeral industry—people who seemingly have more experience and understanding of the complexity of grief—it still eludes us. Navigating loss, particularly at a time of social isolation and change, can be daunting, at the very least. It can be crippling especially for those who have had to endure loss without ritual, without community, and without avenues of expression.

It was with all this in mind that Arlington decided to launch Love, Loss, Legacy: a fundraiser and grief workshop series for bereaved families. Launched in May 2022, just in time for Mental Health Awareness Month, the company sought to provide bereaved families with avenues of expression and ways of navigating loss through speech, movement and art. It was also in commemoration of Arlington's 40th year of serving bereaved families that the company decided to launch the three-part workshop series held on May 14, May 21 and May 28, 2022. Although the program was open to all, we thought of our pandemic clients in particular, whose experiences of grief bring a level of complexity and difficulty better handled by those in the field of grief studies and therapy. Thus, we thought of working alongside instructors who could provide insight, expertise and guidance on ways to navigate loss—be it through a grief forum, a yoga and meditation class or even art therapy.

The workshop series included a grief seminar and open forum with certified grief coach, Cathy Babao on May 14; a yoga therapy workshop with trained yoga therapy instructor Bianca Cueva on May 21, and an art therapy and painting workshop with artist Rommel Pacio in partnership with local paint studio Sip and Gogh on May 28. Held virtually for the safety and the comfort of the participants, the workshops were hosted through Arlington's webcasting server and Zoom. The workshop series catered to families of various backgrounds, each one bringing a profoundly personal experience of grief. Majority of the participants were recent client-families, most of whom had lost loved ones to COVID-19 and other co-morbidities.

Love, Loss, Legacy was designed as a threefold endeavor: as an aftercare initiative for bereaved families; as a fundraising program for displaced jeepney drivers from the local community; and as an education and public relations platform in partnership with the teachers involved in the project. In order to raise enough money for the cause, the workshop participants from Love, Loss, Legacy were given the option to donate a minimum amount of PHP 1,000 (\$18) per workshop or PHP 2,000 (\$36) to participate in all three workshops. Fortunately, most families enrolled in the full workshop series, with some donating as much as PHP 5,000 (\$100) to PHP 40,000 (\$800) for the cause.

Love, Loss, Legacy was launched as a fundraiser for the Tatalon-Araneta Avenue Jeepney Drivers Association, the main beneficiary for several projects of Arlington throughout the year. Composed of 148 jeepney drivers, the association members were severely affected by the lockdown restrictions in Manila. With major thoroughfares shut down and their livelihood dependent on public transportation, jeepney drivers were left on the streets to fend for themselves, with some resorting to begging for money, food and supplies. Arlington's aim was to provide displaced jeepney drivers and workers with pandemic-related support and assistance.

As the world continues to turn and bounce back from the pandemic, the road to recovery still seems far off. Jeepney drivers still have to contend with oil price hikes and sanitation costs. Proceeds from Love, Loss, Legacy have been directed towards purchasing sanitation kits, which the drivers needed for

disinfecting their vehicles. Each jeepney driver was also given a care package with grocery items for their respective families. Alongside this, Arlington will continue to offer succeeding projects for the benefit of the drivers association, seeing to it that the assistance is not a one-off thing, but rather a continuous process and charitable partnership.

Love, Loss, Legacy allowed for our staff members to reach out to our client families in an aftercare setting, leading both our staff members and clients to realize that funeral service is not a mere transaction but rather, a constant calling to help families navigate loss while living in the "new normal". For Arlington staff members, who themselves lost loved ones in recent months or years, the grief workshop series was a welcome break and much-needed opportunity for them to acknowledge their personal loss and honor their loved ones through the various workshops.

In addition to this, the ongoing partnership with the jeepney drivers association has allowed our staff members to engage with the community and to forge meaningful ties with the local jeepney drivers, who are considered gatekeepers for the commuting public. Conversely, the jeepney drivers from the association have been able to return to work, without having to worry about the cost of sanitation, the price of goods, among other daily obstacles.

Overall, Love, Loss, Legacy served as a wonderful gathering of minds and hearts, albeit virtual for the time being. For the workshop participants in particular, it provided them with unique ways of expressing their grief through speech, yoga and painting. It allowed them to honor their journey of grief and to pay tribute to their deceased loved ones, all while helping a community in need. As one of the participants shared, "Your workshop validated how I've been feeling. There should be a part two."

The workshop series was life-changing, to say the least. It provided the bereaved families, the jeepney drivers, and the Arlington family a priceless gift—that of community, solidarity and purpose. With Arlington's fortieth anniversary underway, this project served as a beautiful reminder for us to remember why we started the business in the first place: to provide personalized funeral service to every family that walks through our doors. Furthermore, it served as a challenge for us to go even further in our work—so that even as bereaved families leave our funeral home and exit our doors, we continue to accompany them on their journey of loss and healing.

Grief, much like love, is a thing that binds us all. It is humanity's collective gift and burden: to love, to experience loss, and to love just the same. Love, Loss, Legacy taught us to honor that truth, to embrace the duality of love and loss, and to transform collective grief into a lasting legacy for the good of others.

Forty years down the road, our journey has just begun—because for as long as there are families to serve and lives to honor, our work and mission will continue.

Baird Funeral Home
Troy, Ohio

Baird Funeral Home strives to provide the optimum in service to the families we serve on a daily basis. As our firm's position statement indicates, 'Personalized Reflections' to help honor and remember loved ones in a uniquely special way we believe in personalizing all services to each family. We also believe in honoring this position of personalization in all aspects of our business and community involvement.

The year 2021 – 2022 brought continued health concerns, abnormal call volumes and creative scheduling and service accommodations. The shock and fog of the 2020 year of COVID slowly began to dissipate however the realities continued to set in. Similar to many of our individual grief processes the pain and reality of the second year of the pandemic took a hold on our families, community caregivers and our funeral home staffs. We, like funeral colleagues across the country were dealing with multiple family member deaths and many young parents succumbing to the pandemic, while still handling our regular deathcare needs throughout the year. We had to continue to be very creative in the services to our families in an effort to bring some normalcy to very abnormal times.

Our young parent services of COVID pulled extra hard on the heartstrings of the community as well as our staff. We found ourselves working with bereaved spouses and children of all ages or in several situations bereaved parents who were now the sole caretaker and providers for their grandchildren. The bereaved parents/grandparents were chartering unknown paths with their grandchildren and we had to help them walk this balance beam after a long battle in a COVID unit. As a staff we made every effort to assist through the arrangement and service process but also after the service with aftercare resources and other resources. We were grateful once again for the community we live and work in that comes to the aid and support of families in their time of crisis and need. We were able to join forces with our schools, churches and other local organizations that had relationships with the young families.

We like our fellow funeral professionals across the state and country continue to serve our families and community the best we can in the midst of personal and professional limitations and struggles. We wake up each day ready to serve families and our communities as best as we can, no matter the circumstances. The pandemic has continued to open us up to new ideas and thought processes for the services we can provide to our families even in times of uncertainty. As always, we give thanks that we have a profession of care and the opportunity to provide personalized service to our families and community.

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

"Helping yourself by Helping": Complementary Alternative Therapies Bereavement Support Programme of the San Vicente Funeral Home Grief Counselling Centre

The rationale behind the idea

Bearing in mind that reactions to the loss of a loved one are highly complex, cover a wide range of feelings and behaviours, and that there is no "infallible" treatment model for all cases, 12 years ago the clinical team of the Grief Counselling Centre at the San Vicente Funeral Home implemented a series of "alternative therapies" to complement the individual psychological consultations, support groups and the institutional conference "Surviving After the Death of a Loved One" offered to our clients. The aim was to contribute to the improvement of the mental, physical and emotional health of those who are grieving and as a strategy to facilitate their recovery.

There are currently six different programmes for all our users (young people, adults and the elderly): painting, "shared talents", a literary workshop, yoga, audio-visual workshops and mindfulness. In addition, on a monthly basis, we offer a film forum in which users discuss specific topics based on the screening of a film. All the programmes are permanent and free of charge.

Due to the lockdown decreed by the government because of the Covid-19 pandemic, all the alternative therapies programmes continued to be offered to the community virtually, with the aim of not interrupting the learning processes while at the same time offering an alternative to counteract the anxiety and stress generated by social distancing and the pandemic.

Detailed description of the programme, service and activities

Given that going through a grieving process is a significantly stressful, painful and complex experience, which often generates insomnia, lack of concentration, loss of memory, poor academic and work performance, sadness, hopelessness, low self-esteem, tearfulness, isolation, etc., the Grief Counselling Centre of the San Vicente Funeral Home decided to offer other activities to complement its clinical services in order to facilitate the recovery from bereavement.

Allowing oneself to engage in "creative acts", whether through art, handicrafts or writing, transforms reality by enabling mourners to take an active position in the face of grief, generating greater confidence, self-esteem, as well as developing skills, all of which contribute to physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

For this reason, in 2010 the Grief Counselling Centre decided to hire a plastic arts teacher who would offer an annual teaching programme, focusing on drawing, colour theory, perception of space, mimesis, perspective, chiaroscuro and other painting techniques. In addition, the course would be accompanied by one of the psychologists from the Grief Counselling Centre to provide psychological support for the process. In this way, art and psychology were combined to provide comprehensive support to our users. On the one hand, the art teacher accompanied the process from the technical point of view, while the psychologist did so from the point of view of emotional expression.

Following this, another of the programmes implemented in the alternative therapies was "shared talents" and handicrafts. In the same way, accompanied by one of the psychologists of the Grief Counselling Centre, participants shared their knowledge in different areas such as cooking, make-up, personal care and handicrafts. The aim was to promote the therapeutic impact of helping others to develop their own skills.

At the beginning, several workshops were held, but as time went by it became difficult to find new users with the availability and knowledge to take on the activities, so a crafts teacher (Margarita Sánchez) was hired, who for 8 years has taught various classes in embroidery, country art, doll making and Christmas

decorations. However, although the classes are now under the permanent supervision of Margarita, we continue to encourage those who have knowledge in different areas and wish to share it to do so in this space.

The benefits of participating in the shared talents and painting courses include the development of greater self-esteem and confidence, establishing links with other people, developing new skills and the possibility of generating a source of extra income from the sale of the products made.

It should be noted that during the pandemic both the above workshops continued to be delivered virtually as a way of continuing to accompany our users in the midst of the uncertainty and confinement generated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Literary workshop

With the passage of time and the increase in the number of people attended by the Grief Counselling Centre in 2016 (approximately 834 people per month), it was proposed to also expand the range of alternative therapies, given that the clinical team observed that the people attending these spaces showed greater adherence to the psychological processes and better evolution in their grieving process. However, not all people were attracted to painting or handicrafts. For this reason, and considering that writing is a very effective tool in the grieving process, the literary workshop was created. It is led by the psychologist Cristian Arbeláez, who has a Master's degree in literature and is a storyteller. As a result of the meetings, the first collection of stories written in the workshop were published in 2020 and are available (in Spanish) on the San Vicente Funeral Home website.

In the literary workshop, participants develop creative and aesthetic skills that enable them to write a range of texts: reports, short stories, essays and chronicles. These skills are taught through writing exercises based on *Gramática de la fantasía* by Gianni Rodari (1973) and *El Taller de Creación Literaria* (2013) by Luis Fernando Macías, as well as through the performance of oral storytelling exercises and therapeutic play.

Yoga

Given that physical activity contributes to physical and emotional wellbeing, in 2018 we began to offer users of the Grief Counselling Centre of San Vicente Funeral Home the possibility of attending yoga classes in which, through asana body positions and meditation exercises, participants develop greater control of emotions such as anxiety, depression and anger, among others. In addition, these help to reduce stress, improve self-confidence, coordination and concentration as well as relieve insomnia. This space is led by the psychologist Julián Cardona, who is also a yoga instructor.

Audio-visual Production Workshop

In 2020, in the midst of the Covid-19 quarantine when it was not possible to carry out activities in person, the psychologist of the Grief Counselling Centre, Andrés García, together with Adriana Conrado, teacher, communicator, audio-visual producer and user of the institution, initiated the Audio-visual Production Workshop as an alternative therapy in which the users of the Grief Counselling Centre were able to celebrate the life of their loved ones who had passed away, whether by Covid or other causes, through the elaboration of tributes to the memory, history and life shared with them, by means of posters, videos, and short films. Through the use of art, creativity and symbols, emotions, memories and gratitude were expressed.

The success of the experience and therapeutic benefits were such that it was considered important to share this work with the community in general (grievers and non-grievers), through the audio-visual festival: "La Vida en Cortos -El Corazón a través del Lente", which will celebrate its third version in 2022.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the latest addition to the alternative therapies offered by the Grief Counselling Centre. Through weekly meetings, those attending this space, which is conducted virtually and led by the Grief Counselling Centre's psychologist Lisy Castro, the aim is to strengthen people's attention to the present moment, focusing on what is happening in the here and now, working on acceptance and prejudices. For the grieving process it is very important to deal with these aspects because there is often a tendency to remain stuck in the past as well as feeling guilt for what was done or not done. Mindfulness work also helps to control stress and anxiety, insomnia, aids concentration, develops emotional intelligence, improves interpersonal relationships, promotes creativity and improves memory.

Benefits provided to the San Vicente Funeral Home staff

Faithful to its commitment to contribute to the emotional wellbeing of its users, San Vicente Funeral Home considers it important to constantly evaluate the mental health needs of people who have lost loved ones, in order to make up-to-date proposals with scientific support that facilitate the grieving process. For this reason, the Grief Counselling Centre and its clinical team frequently evaluate the relevance of implementing new programmes that position San Vicente Funeral Home as a national and international point of reference in the psychological care of bereavement.

The alternative therapies programme fosters a sense of belonging among participants, in addition to the recognition by the employees of the San Vicente Funeral Home that the company offers the community effective alternatives for dealing with grief.

On the other hand, for the clinical team of the Grief Counselling Centre, participating as coordinators or companions of the teachers who lead the alternative therapies workshops contributes to reducing the levels of stress generated by the constant accompaniment of bereavement situations and thereby prevents burnout.

Benefits provided to families and the wider community.

When a loved one has been lost, it often happens that the representation of reality is affected in multiple areas, including interpersonal bonds, dreams and life purpose, self-esteem and the desire to live. With the alternative therapies programme, trust in others and self-esteem can be re-established, new bonds with other people can be created and new skills can be acquired that give new meaning to life, while at the same time the loss is re-signified and grief is processed.

Lastly, in recognition of the commitment and work done throughout the year, in the second week of December the alternative therapies closing ceremony is held, an event in which the students of the programme invite their families and other users of the Grief Counselling Centre to get to know their work and be encouraged to participate next year.

Funeraria Y Camposanto Santa Ana Cuenca, Ecuador

In the month of August 2021, the Duel Support Center began a psycho-education program for children with "Cuento Mio" by the writer Maria Caridad Vázquez, the illustrator Maria Paula Martinez, with the support of the psychologist María Fernanda Vintimilla, in order to explain grief in children as a process that must be guided in its different phases. Mio is a story that accompanies the loss of a loved one, and provides the child with the possibility of understanding the departure, the stages, and the emotions that may be involved in a grieving process.

The characters and dialogues of the story were designed precisely so that the child absorbs the information in an easier way, and with less emotional impact.

In our company, the employees received a copy to be delivered to their children and thus they perceived the process of psychoeducation in grief for children, especially after the pandemic.

A drawing contest was also held for the children of our employees on the characters in the story, motivating understanding and learning about issues of grief and managing emotions that are implicit in Cuento Mio.

The grief support center has reached different schools in our city, thus having the opportunity to give talks and conferences to different groups such as psychological guidance departments, teaching and administrative staff, and students of different educational levels, giving them a copy of Cuento Mio and also a digital version as well. We can list the following schools:

CENTRO EDUCATIVO ABC PRIMARY
SAGRADOS CORAZONES SCHOOL
JULIO MATOVELLE HIGH SCHOOL
MANUELA GUERRERO SCHOOL
CIUDAD DE CUENCA SCHOOL
CENTRO EDUCATIVO MADRID SCHOOL
SANTA ANA SCHOOL
CARLOS ZAMBRANO SCHOOL
ANGEL POLIVIO CHARVEZ SCHOOL
ALFONSO CARRION HEREDIA SCHOOL
CATALINA GUERRERO SCHOOL
ESCUELA SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA SCHOOL
HOGAR DEL ADULTO MAYOR NURSING HOME
SAN LUIS BELTRAN SCHOOL
SANTA MARIANITA DE JESUS SCHOOL
LICEO AMERICANO HIGH SCHOOL
LA DOLOROSA QUITO HIGH SCHOOL
FLACSO QUITO UNIVERSITY

In the same way we reach geriatric centers where older adults maintain situations of mourning either due to the loss of a loved one, abandonment or depressive symptoms typical of age. With the "Cuento Mio" they have been able to understand in a calmer way the departure of a loved one, it is also an effective reading tool for the better management of emotions and facilitates the elderly an adequate understanding of topics such as: separation anxiety and depression.

Through digital platforms, it has been possible to reach places outside of our city, such as universities in Quito and outside of our country, specifically to Latino communities in New York. We have provided informative conferences for migrants, primary school teachers and many families who need emotional support on issues of child and adult grief.

We have also delivered the "Cuento Mio" to health institutions such as the "Society for the Fight Against Cancer - Solca" in the city of Cuenca, which cares for children with cancer. Health personnel also participated. In this way, we have contributed to the children, the health area and their families, who need to better learn issues related to the loss of a loved one.

Johnston & Williams Funeral Home and Crematory Ellensburg, Washington

A common activity for the staff at a funeral home is to give referrals to resources for healing the hearts of those that have come to lay a loved one to rest. There are programs in person and online and through reading books in abundance. One trend with the grief support programs in our small rural area is that they are short programs with little follow up. We at Johnston & Williams Funeral Home and Crematory saw a gap and knew it was our duty to fill it. The idea had been brewing in our minds for some years. Our then office manager (now our Celebrant & Family Services Coordinator) Tiffany Metzger had been studying grief and all the emotional aspects of death and dying. Through this study, she had created a foundation of thought to guide a group for grief. Henry Johnston had been creating relationships in the community with providers in hospice and mental healthcare and so, after a few meetings to plan, Peace by Piece was created.

Peace by Piece is a grief group that meets once a month and will continue to do so indefinitely. Our grief group is a service provided by the funeral home at no cost to attendees. It is led by two mental health professionals and one staff member from Johnston & Williams. This group leadership choice is paramount to the success of the group. The people that attend will always be sure that they are in capable hands as they share their experiences in grief. Our group is seated in a circle so that everyone gets to see the faces of others, their neighbors, who are experiencing the same kind of feelings as them. We initiate the group session with a round of introductions or reintroductions and lighting a candle for a loved one missed. After the introductions, we share a grief related topic and continue around the circle sharing experiences with the topic in mind. We close the group with a meditative moment to calm our guests as they return to their daily lives.

This grief group is different from all the others in our area. All other programs offered by hospice groups and churches have a short-term curriculum. We have often had repeat requests from neighbors in search of another grief support group after one had ended. Peace by Piece is designed to be on-going and can be used while people are in attendance to other groups. In our small town, grief often alienates folks. Everyone is so close that they often want to be perceived as "back to normal" as soon as possible. The inevitability of grief returning here and there throughout one's lifetime is a factor that we at Johnston & Williams wanted to tackle. In this model of group, our neighbors can attend and see friends in a safe environment for grief. There is no saving face or protecting the feelings of their neighbors by hiding tears, this is the place to cry. This is the place for kinship in healing.

Peace by Piece provides an enhanced sense of purpose to our staff. The ability to invite people that are new to grief instead of relying only on referrals, gives us a more intimate way to assist. It is a very sacred thing to set up our funeral parlor for guests in this way. We are well versed in setting up for a funeral. It is a very fulfilling feeling to be able to set up for the next step in healing after that. Our staff are also welcomed to join in the group to share their experiences of grief or to seek understanding of the concept through supporting their neighbors through grief.

**Joseph Vertin & Sons Funeral Home
Breckenridge, Minnesota**

The staff at Joseph Vertin and Sons Funeral Home look to initiate community outreach programs or are happy to participate and partner with other local organizations to help acknowledge and learn about the effects of grief and how to work through those hard emotions after the loss of a loved one. Recently, our Grief Care Coordinator was contacted to explore offering a program for the students of Circle of Nations School. Circle of Nations School located in Wahpeton, ND is a residential school serving the Native American population across the United States. Some of the students attending the school have experienced loss of friends and family members through death. The death of someone close to a student could have happened either prior to their attendance at the school or during the school year while they are away from their close family and friends. The staff at Circle of Nations School reached out to explore what could be offered to allow students to express and process their grief through the help of our grief care coordinator. We held initial planning meetings to outline and define the need, determine expectations, and formulate what would best serve the students. We created a hybrid of utilizing a local resource of youth development and resiliency and opportunities throughout our sessions to express the grief with staff members. Staff members and students participated in 4, 1-2 hours sessions throughout the months of April and May. We utilized activities that engaged the students to reflect on life circumstances and how they respond. We explored the emotions that accompany loss and what things feel supportive. We challenged students to identify at least 5 anchors (key people) in their lives that support them by role modeling, character building and offering resources to navigate life challenges. One of the challenges was the shortened time frame we had to implement this into the students and staff lives. A goal to expand this resource and tools into the 2022-2023 school year to allow for more weeks to delve further and deeper into more meaningful experiences for the students and staff. We measured success on verbal feedback from staff with regard to planting seeds for further dialogue with students and students being able to navigate their life situations feeling supported with tools and resources. The small impact of showing up in the lives of children and affirming that emotions and behaviors associated with grief are unique to them. Identifying those emotions and honoring them through expression, self-reflection, and partnering with trusted individuals to help guide them throughout that season of grief is valuable.

Lord & Stephens Funeral Homes Athens, Georgia

Lord & Stephens Funeral Homes carries on its thirty-three years of service to the Georgia communities of Clarke, Madison, Oconee, and Oglethorpe counties by their continued dedication to serving each family in their care with dignity and excellence. Anticipating the many unique challenges and needs of families as they navigate loss remains a top priority to that commitment. Many families often find themselves in the uncharted waters of never having had to make final arrangements or deal with the myriad of tasks required after that loss of a loved one. Lord & Stephens sought to 'map' out this often confusing and emotional time for families, by implementing an informative and engaging aftercare program.

Lord & Stephens began their aftercare program, Everything After, on July 1, 2021. The Everything After program features digital or printed resources that provide clear instruction to help walk families through every step necessary to close an estate and manage personal affairs. Steps covered include such tasks as closing accounts, notifying organizations and entities, claiming benefits, protecting against fraud, and many more topics of interest. Families can also ask their specific questions and get help from qualified experts. Beyond the logistical needs of families, Everything After also provides free grief support courses and resources.

Families are given the opportunity to enroll in the program upon meeting with their funeral director during their initial appointment at the funeral home. A personalized video from the Lord & Stephens Aftercare Counselor, Ray Finger, introduces the family to the benefits and process of enrolling in Everything After. Each funeral director then helps scan a QR code that allows families to create a contact on their phone, so that no valuable resources are lost or categorized as spam. If sensitivity to the family during an initial meeting doesn't lend to enrollment at that time, another opportunity is presented by an Everything After flyer included upon receipt of the death certificate. Families are made aware that these complimentary services can be accessed at any time and at no cost.

An individual may also choose to set an Everything After appointment with Ray Finger. In that appointment, Mr. Finger spends the initial meeting time by inquiring about their well-being since their loss. He is focused on discovering how that individual is coping both physically and emotionally and can recommend additional resources if needed. Striving to provide excellent service, individuals are encouraged to give any feedback of their experience with Lord & Stephens. Lastly, individuals are presented with the opportunity to preplan their own final wishes. Because of their intimate awareness of the entire process of having arranged for their loved one's needs, it enables an easy conversation for the benefits of planning ahead for themselves. However, no individual is pressured to move forward, and sensitivity remains of utmost importance.

Not only does Everything After provide valuable resources to families, it allows Lord & Stephens with the means to continue building relationships with the communities they serve. It is also because of their continued dedication to helping families make many of the 'unknowns' known that Lord & Stephens Funeral Homes is motivated to serve others not only in their time of need, but also in Everything After.

**Pedersen Funeral & Cremation Service
Morris, Minnesota**

In 2021, the staff at Pedersen Funeral Home, headed by our grief care coordinator, Rose Murphy, started a program that we have named our "Remembrance Garden." For \$100 an individual or family can purchase a paver with their loved one's name engraved to be laid within a walking path amongst the beautiful gardens of the West Central Research and Outreach Center in Morris, Minnesota.

The money raised by the sale of a paver helps defer the cost of the paver with engraving, setting of the paver, and upkeep of the garden to ensure it is a beautiful and serene sanctuary for families to enjoy for years to come.

With the idea that grief doesn't end with the funeral, we wanted to provide the families that we serve something that they can hold onto for months and years after the fact. Once a family has purchased a paver and chosen what they would like to have engraved, the paver is set within one of the walking paths or seating areas at the Remembrance Garden and will remain there as a place to visit indefinitely. The beautiful and inviting garden is the perfect place for families to walk, or sit, and reflect on their loved one.

Just in our first year of facilitating this project we have gotten a lot of interest and positive feedback from the community, selling almost 50 engraved pavers! Our staff feels that our Remembrance Garden is really something special, and has become a big part of what we are able to offer our families beyond the funeral.

While all of our staff members have put an incredible amount of effort into this project, we would not have been able to do it without the help of others. We have been lucky to have the support and involvement of many other organizations to help make this dream a reality; including: Rausch Monument Company of Big Stone City, South Dakota, Max's Landscaping of Morris, Minnesota, KMRS/KKOK radio station for doing a special feature on the garden and continued advertising, and, of course, the Horticulture Display Garden at the West Central Research and Outreach Center.

Our funeral home is happy that this project not only brings business and awareness to the organizations involved in helping make the garden happen, we so are proud to put our own name on it. We are thrilled that something we put so much time and effort into has genuinely given the families we serve the feeling of continued care. We are all happy with what we have been able to do just in the last year and are excited to see where this project goes in the future.

**Posey Funeral Directors
North Augusta, South Carolina**

R.O.C.K. Grief Camp: Casting Ripples of Lasting Partnerships

Posey Funeral Directors' vision states that Posey seeks to "deliver impactful, meaningful experiences which help those we serve connect with the community of healing around them." Fundamental to accomplishing this is Posey's continuous efforts to build community partnerships, or opportunities to build relationships centered on trust and mutual goals. Walker Posey has served on the board of The Family Y of Augusta for the past 10 years, so, when he proposed the idea of a camp for bereaved children, the board knew him; his commitment to their mission "to serve individuals and families in the CSRA through programs designed to build healthy spirit, mind and body;" and felt that working together would be a beneficial fit.

Both Posey Funeral Directors and The Family Y of Greater Augusta serve a common geographic area, with families living in an 8-county region spanning across Georgia and South Carolina. Within this area, there have historically been no grief centers or grief-related camps for children or families. Any grief counseling or grief support groups have been offered for adults only through a few local churches and a very small group of private therapists and counselors. According to the 2020 Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model by Judi's House JAG Institute and New York Life Foundation, an estimated 4,670 children living in this eight-county region will be bereaved due to the death of a parent by the time they reach age 18. So, due to such a lack of resources and a viable number of potential candidates in need, both organizations saw the great need for a camp experience that would bring children who recently experienced the death of a primary caregiver together to support one another and be aided in their grief journey by trained grief professionals. The Children's Hospital of Georgia keenly knew of this need and was willing to join the partnership, especially since they had already been engaged for many years with The Family Y offering a variety of camps for their patients at the Y's Camp Lakeside facility. The CHOG had the volunteers and basic camp curriculums together; we just needed to tailor the resources to meet the specific needs of our potential campers.

To develop a well-rounded, responsible program specifically designed for bereaved children ages 6-16, additional development personnel were tapped from local hospices and schools including Trinity Hospice and Aiken County, Richmond County, and Columbia County schools. The partnership, now led by Melissa Posey Loose, The Family Y's CEO Danny McConnell, and CHOG's Chief Child Life Specialist Kimberly Allen, formed a committee representing the community partnership with CHOG staff and administrators, hospice leaders, educators, and Family Y staff to raise additional support from the community, develop the camp program curriculum, and secure needed trained volunteers, including certified grief specialists. Together, the committee identified that the initial purpose of the camp was to help children "Remember Others and Create Keepsakes" that would foster those memories and aid them in their grief journey. Thus, the group decided on the name R.O.C.K. Grief Camp, with the nickname quickly being turned into "Camp R.O.C.K." After two years of planning and surviving the initial waves of the COVID pandemic, the camp finally came to fruition!

Initially designed as an overnight experience, Camp R.O.C.K. was offered as a day camp opportunity with a maximum of 40 campers, due to mask regulations and distancing requirements still in place, last August 28, 2021, for children ages 6 to 16 who experienced the loss of a primary caregiver within the twelve months prior. This one-day, no-cost-to-camper experience, held at The Family Y's Camp Lakeside facility in Lincolnton, GA, empowered 33 grieving children through the efforts of 50 community day camp volunteers, including Posey staff members, to ensure professional, philanthropic, pastoral and volunteer connections. Camp R.O.C.K. provided a safe place for children learning to cope with grief to find a true sense of hope that could change their life.

During a day filled with fun activities including kayaking, crafts, rock wall climbing, and a trip to a music creation studio on campus at the camp, the campers, divided into age-appropriate groupings designated by healthcare and education professionals, connected with others who were on similar grief journeys. Interspersed with the fun were opportunities to meet in small groups for learning and discussion about

grief and what these children were experiencing physically, mentally, and spiritually within themselves and their families. To address these unique needs during their small breakout sessions, campers engaged in activities like decorating dual-sided masks. The outer side represented how others perceived them and their emotions and the inner side represented how they perceived themselves and their own responses and feelings. At the end of the day, all campers gathered together to paint rocks memorializing their deceased caregiver. Each camper was able to place their rock in a memorial rock garden and take an additional painted rock home as a memorial keepsake honoring their journey and their loved one. At the closing session, each camper was also given a reusable tote bag with an embroidered blanket noting the name of the camp. The committee decided that a blanket would be a gift of physical comfort appropriate for all age groups present.

As the Dalai Lama noted, "Just as ripples spread out when a single pebble is dropped into water, the actions of individuals can have far-reaching effects." The 2021 day camp sent 33 campers back to their homes with renewed hope developed through connections, assuring them that they are not alone in their journey. The 2021 camp also sent 50 volunteers back to their own homes with confirmation that they had made a difference and altered the course of the lives of children for the better. Indeed, they had participated in accomplishing the Posey vision of "deliver[ing] impactful, meaningful experiences which help those we serve connect with the community of healing around them." With many of the same volunteers and involvement R.O.C.K. Grief Camp will be held again this year on August 27.

**Primaveras
Sao Paulo, Brazil**

Primaveras Welcome Day

The best preparation for mourning is for society to be open to welcoming and dealing with this suffering. Valeria Tinoco.

Providing a safe environment for the expression of pain, welcoming Primavera clients and non-clients through a program of spiritual and psychological support, enabling the bereaved to re-signify grief, being socially relevant so that any individual can find support in the grieving journey, are the objectives of this project.

It is important that the person is welcomed and heard in their pain. Understand the bereaved in different dimensions, being them; physical, spiritual, social, cognitive or behavioral and offering the possibility to narrate their story, makes this process possible, makes it bearable. We think of offering resources, enabling the construction of new meanings, thus realizing that they are not alone in their suffering.

The reception day has a schedule that includes; Mass held by the Local Parish and validated by the Diocese of the city, Lecture with a Psychologist Specialized in Mourning, balloon ceremony, Group to support Mourning held in person and online by psychologists with more than 10 years of experience in mourning and tribute stations.

Each station was designed to access people who participate in the event in different ways. The names are, Recognize, Revive, and Flourish.

The Recognize station offers personalized items such as mugs, obituaries, picture frames, tiles, paintings, candles among other items that can embrace the memory or give gifts to the people who share life. At the Reviver station, we encourage tasting items such as jellies, pates, jams, cakes, breads, butter cookies, among other items that access the affective memory through the palate. In the season and Florescer we offer assorted flowers and personalized arrangements to compose in a unique way the choice and needs of the people who participate in the event.

To conclude, we emphasize that for Primavera it is important, through this project, to offer products that symbolize care and reception, encouraging the expression of mourning through different objects and tributes and being able to achieve a broad perception of customers and non-customers about the companies of the Group.

Waitt Funeral Home and Cremation Service Morganville, New Jersey

Spring, Animals, and Grief Recovery

As funeral professionals, we are always looking for ways to connect and help families. Funeral homes across the country everyday run programs to educate and provide resources to families before and after a death, from preneed programs, aftercare mailers, hotlines, seminars, and holiday events, you name it a funeral home has tried it. Our team felt the need to take what has been used in the past and find a way to deliver it in a new way that would engage families but maintain our core philosophy of "Ministry to the Bereaved". With this new approach in mind our team at Waitt Funeral Home & Cremation Service would gather for creative sessions and brainstorming ideas and concepts. However, we just couldn't settle on any ideas, until one day an idea popped into our head and off, we went.

In March of 2021, my family and I purchased an old run-down farm. The farm contained two barns, a chicken coop, garages, paddocks and ranch style home. The farm is privately secluded around modern suburban housing developments, providing privacy yet a warmth to the neighborhood and reminiscent of times past. The farm was once a well-known breeding farm for racehorses. As the prior owner aged and needed to rely on others to maintain it, the farm fell into serious disrepair. So poorly maintained, that most of the paddock fencing was not connected and animals would often wonder out of the pastures into the local neighborhood. Roadways needed to be maintained, weeds that grew into trees had to be cut and removed, barns restored, fencing installed, water lines fixed you name it, it needed it.

Over the course of Spring and Summer 2021, renovations and projects began to take place. New post fencing was installed, paddocks had been redefined, access roads developed, an old 100-year-old barn was restored, and repurposed, and new equipment was purchased to maintain the grounds. In time we learned that many farm animals cannot be cared for through the end of their lives, and many are given away after years of ownership. In short, our family decided to be a place where we could be an animal sanctuary for these loved animals and provide them a new home. Over time Alpaca's, Jacob Sheep, Chickens, and even a blind Pony now call our farm home. We learned a lot, but also made a lot of mistakes, and some funny enough perhaps to have our own show about. But as each season changed it brought new opportunities and challenges on a farm, and you must always plan and prepared or the lives of the animals can be at stake. And then winter hit. Our area was hit with one of the coldest in recent years and with high accumulations of snow.

Winter of 21-22 was a learning experience. The difficulties of weather from extreme cold, freezing conditions, snow, icing of water troughs, shortened days, and care for the animals was hard to manage. By February of 2022, we longed for spring, warmth, and the joy that comes when the weather breaks. This was the ah-ha moment.

The idea was born, we would use our farm story about restoration and animals to provide hope for those experiencing grief. We would use the love of the animals to show that life has beautiful moments that we can still experience. We would use the weather seasons to show that grief goes through cycles, each just as important as the next. We would show that with love and patience life can go on.

Our plan was to hold an event over three sessions during Spring of 2022 in April, May and June to highlight the farm, "Coming to Life". We felt that a farm experience was a family event so children's activities, childcare, and crafts were important to our event. Rather than setting up tables and chairs, we brought in hay bails and pallets, flannel blankets to offset seating areas for a farm feel. Each message would be a message of hope sprinkled in with farm stories and opportunities to fellowship and wonder around and meet the animals. Email blasts to previously served families and outreach to local churches provided enough contacts for us to set dates, rsvp's and staff resources. We contacted a friend who previously led women's group bible studies to coordinate the services over the three sessions. A copy of the first email blast is attached.

The first day of Spring has arrived. As many say Spring has sprung. The flowers are sprouting. The birds are back and singing. The sun is shining later in the day. For some this is a welcome for others who have experienced a loss it can be difficult to adjust.

Why do you feel so sad? So stuck? So empty? So sad, overwhelmed and angry? Why do you long for cold, rainy, dark days? Because you are grieving.

Jennifer Stern LISW writes in her blog about grief and spring, "Because Spring can feel like pressure. Pressure to be present and live life in spite of how you are feeling on the inside. Pressure to feel a semblance of normal. Pressure to believe in the possibility of new. Spring, feels like a betrayal of your grief. Grief is not predictable. It does not follow an order as the seasons do. It is personal. It is painful. It is messy. Grief can feel surprising, shocking, never ending. Spring feels contrary to the realities of grief. . . .those feelings do not match the sights and sounds of Spring. And yet there is much to be learned from the audacity of Spring. Those feelings of deep grief are the winter frost forcing us to lie dormant, to turn in, to be in (and of) our grief. Trust in time that your Spring will come. That you too will begin to thaw. That in time you can and you will push through the bitter heaviness of grief. You will bloom once again, new and different. You will begin to grow towards the sun and find respite and healing in its warmth. Your Spring will come. In your time. In your way. Lean into Spring. Nature provides a model for grieving, healing, and resilience. Nature teaches us that there is a season for everything."

With the Spring Season upon us, our family is inviting you to our interactive grief program on our farm, C1 Farms in Morganville. This three part program will feature readings, a short message, moments to reflect, arts and crafts for children, but most importantly an opportunity to give of yourself and be surrounded by animals that are totally dependent on you for their needs. On a farm there is a never ending list of chores that are needed, care of pastures, woodland management, fertilizing, maintenance and the list goes on and on. Most important are water and feed to the animals. What I find amazing is that our horses, alpacas, chickens, rooster, sheep, lambs and dog totally depend on us each day to feed them. They trust completely that we will meet their needs morning and night. In giving of our time, building this connection with them our hearts are filled. Many of our animals have stories of pain and sadness from our Rooster named Doc, to our rescue of Finn, our blind pony, each with special care and needs of their own. Yet this season will bring new life to our farm with the birth of lambs and baby chicks hatching. In giving you receive, there is no great truth. There are loved ones, friends and your community that depend on you, you are important. Our hope is that through our farm story and interactive sessions day that you will find inspiration.

Full details including date and time will be released in the coming days.

Our first session was amazing. We had over 100 participants and many children making crafts and learning about animals. It was an inspiring event. Connections were made, friendships developed, and some children even saw alpacas for the first time. Each subsequent session grew in attendance and the message of loss, restoration, hope, and opportunity was given. Each month the attendance grew, and more new faces attended. Many attended all three sessions which were held at C1 Farms, Morganville, on:

Friday, April 29th from 10-11 AM
Friday, May 27th from 10-11 AM
Friday, June 10th from 10-11 AM

One of the biggest surprises were the amount of people that sought to volunteer on the farm. They looked to give of their time to help the farm, take care of the animals and in turn fill their hearts. To this day we have people that come to help with our pastures and even a retired farm manager that was at the last of the three programs, coordinated with us to re-home two miniature donkeys to the farm.

Even our family and team were blessed by the program, not just in being able to provide a venue and program to reach our community but also in receiving friendships, advise and two amazing animals Summer and Coal, that now call our farm home!

The entire series of events were a success. It allowed the staff and funeral home to be seen in a completely different aspect. Overall, we couldn't be more pleased with the outcome, the impact it had, not just on our families and community but on us as well.

We are already in planning stages for an Autumn Event at the farm in 2022.