



Pursuit of Excellence

2026 Innovative Ideas Essays

Community Outreach: Children, Teens and Schools

Alderson-Ford Funeral Home, Cheshire, Connecticut

Alderson-Ford Funeral Home, Naugatuck, Connecticut

Buckmiller Ford Mengacci Funeral Homes, Waterbury, Connecticut

During the calendar year of 2025, full-time staff member, funeral director, and “deputy” embalmer, Melissa “Missy” Melin-Miles, committed herself and tirelessly served as President of her state’s funeral director association. As president, several vendors, suppliers, and funeral-industry related businesses reached out to her to share their products or programs. One particular important program impacted single-mother, Ms. Melin-Miles, as it concerned grieving children, a soft-spot for Missy with her personal dedication towards attention to babies and children.

The rationale behind the idea, and in consideration of social norms, mores and myths concerning children, Missy had the foresight to implement and expand upon the overlooked areas concerning children and their grief. “The Healing Chickadee”, an ongoing grief program specifically for children, took flight and landed in our funeral homes during 2026.

For years, the Alderson-Ford Funeral Homes, Inc. has provided the Funeral Service Foundation’s Youth & Funerals in booklet form, and ebook via our website. The Healing Chickadee, Missy believed, would complement our already established grief resources. Missy viewed the new program as another tool that our funeral directors could utilize in a meaningful and impressionable way for children- who are likely experiencing the death of a loved one for the first time in their young lives. And, what child does not like a cute plushie toy!

Our funeral home has been introducing the program to families by providing the chickadee to the child/children in the grieving family. Our online visitors may also gain access to the program via our website under our “Grief Resources” section. The chickadee plush replica, “DeeDee”, is an Audubon black-capped chickadee bird, manually press-button activated, to produce a realistic sound provided by The CornellLab of Ornithology. DeeDee is freely presented to the child in a cutely designed carrying case complete with air holes. The funeral director explains the program to the adult(s) caring for the child/children and states that additional chickadee resources can be found at healingchickadee@gmail.com This information is also in a pre-printed hand-out placed in the carrying case. If desired, additional chickadee plushies can be purchased online at the current wholesale cost of \$25 each. Our funeral home has elected provide DeeDee without cost to the particular family.

The benefit to families is stated best in the mission of The Healing Chickadee:

“that your child finds comfort through the company of our benevolent birds as he or she copes with the loss and learns to grieve.” The online program states, “Let the healing chickadee help guide your child through the soulful forest to the grief Glen. This is where children may learn communication and coping skills after the death of a loved one. DeeDee the Chickadee and her friends, the Tweethearts, share their stories of loss. The feathered friends provide activities, songs and videos”.

The songs on the website are done by a Disney composer, and videos are “birds with words”, where DeeDee and her bird friends discuss concepts associated with grieving, such as fear, anger, regret, forgiveness and more. This is intended to foster communication for the child to better understand and express how they are feeling to their loved ones. The invaluable grief education provided at The Healing Chickadee couples the simplicity of nature, with a thoughtful, age-appropriate delivery, accessible and relatable to children.

Nowadays, we’ve all seen savvy toddlers and very young children using internet-capable electronic devices. Via internet in their homes, libraries or schools, children are enabled to have a healthy and interactive way to learn about their feelings and grief. This is particularly helpful if the child is amongst adult family members who are uncomfortable, grief compromised, or have an avoidant attachment style that makes it difficult for them to engage in discussions of loss with others. As a child begins the process to understand their loss, willing adult family members can expound upon the program and open up a

discussion with their children. This lends itself to better opportunities to move through grief in a healthy manner.

Benefits provided to the funeral home and staff includes empowerment in having the tools to direct progressive and helpful resources that specifically impact young children, (and those young at heart), of the families we are called upon to serve. In the vicinity of several direct-disposal providers, we are reliant upon good word-of-mouth advertisement, regarding our outstanding reputation, knowledge, and ability to provide dedicated, meaningful services. This helps us to maintain the families that we continue to serve, and to serve new families in our communities for their pre-need and at-need services. Our staff repeatedly hears complimentary feed-back that we provide “one-stop shopping” and we strive to avoid complacency. Families tell us this because we take it upon ourselves to simplify, or take on the heavy-lifting for them. Parents and caregivers have been very thankful to us for the resources shared with their child/children, and have shown positive signs of further engagement with their children at home.

Part of maintaining our standard level of service includes the staff’s continuous education, to be up-to-date with matters concerning death care related resources. We feel a sense of pride and fulfillment knowing that the better we can be as informed funeral directors, then the better we can serve as a unique conduit with our families. Furthermore, because families “don’t know what they don’t know”, particularly at a time of high stress, our funeral home has the benefit of offering appropriate actions, and can offer trusted and reliable resources. With the Healing Chickadee program, instead of being viewed by a child as a scary funeral director, who took their deceased family member away from them and put them in a box, children may instead imprint with their first-death experience more positively. Funeral Director, Missy, has become “that nice lady” who took care of their loved one, talked with them and gave them DeeDee when their loved one died.

Perhaps our newer generations’ views of the funeral director, death, grief, and quite possibly the death-care industry, can change with one bird at a time.

Cemitério e Crematório Parque das Allamandas, Londrina, Paraná, Brazil

ALLAMANDAS ACADEMY

The Parque das Allamandas Cemetery and Crematorium, operating for over 10 (ten) years in Londrina, Paraná, aims to provide quality service that promotes ongoing integration with the community.

The idea for the Academia Allamandas project stems from an initiative by the Parque das Allamandas Cemetery and Crematorium, which identified—both in the job market and within its own internal context—that when hiring young apprentices, interns, and assistants, as with young people in general, there was a common shortcoming: a lack of preparation for the start of corporate life, as they are not equipped to face the challenges and demands of contemporary professional life.

In a landscape where competitiveness is on the rise and companies increasingly demand technical and socio-emotional skills, many teenagers and young adults still enter the workforce without the guidance, practical experience, and support necessary to develop in a solid and sustainable manner, resulting in a steep learning curve for the company, which requires more time to see tangible results from these young people.

Thus, inspired by this vision of our Executive Director Lilian Vivan, who in mid-October 2024 initially shared the project at a routine meeting. From there, the idea took shape, being evaluated and discussed with other managers as an innovation fully applicable to our context, one that would fulfill our desire to serve the community by embracing this new approach to training young apprentices, integrating employees and their families, and at the same time uniting the collaborative strength of volunteers from within the company itself.

On the other hand, the assessment of the idea's feasibility highlighted the challenges and difficulties to be overcome, such as allocating the space and furniture needed to hold classes, the timing, duration, and scheduling of classes in light of the availability of volunteer managers acting as instructors, defining the criteria for attracting and selecting students, the profile and capabilities of students we could serve with high-quality standards, and, most importantly, the desired level of content retention among participants, so that we could achieve the goal of developing them and preparing them for the next step: training for employability.

Once these stages were completed and the idea was now more solid and established, it was presented in detail to the company's executive board, who were enthusiastic about the essence of the idea and approved the continuation of the Allamandas Academy project.

Therefore, the rationale for creating the project is based on two pillars, the primary one being social in nature, given that the initiative is entirely free and offered to young people who might otherwise lack the opportunity to access the course materials, enabling the company to contribute to these young people's development and bridge the gap between formal education and the real demands of the corporate world.

The second pillar is institutional: to concretely assume the role of an active agent in human development, reinforcing the company's values—namely ethics and transparency, respect, dignity, safety, innovation, and social and environmental responsibility—to generate a positive and lasting impact on the community in which it operates. In this way, the Allamandas Academy was established with a purpose: to train young people aged 14 to 20, initially the children and relatives of Parque das Allamandas employees, given that many would be unable to provide their children with this preparation for the challenges of the job market. The project seeks to achieve a series of objectives, such as strengthening participants' self-awareness and self-esteem, developing social-emotional and professional skills, and broadening their vision of the future.

LOGO CREATED FOR THE ACADEMIA ALLAMANDAS PROJECT (See supporting documentation - FIGURE 1)

The development of the idea followed well-defined stages, beginning with the planning phase in the second half of 2024. During this period, the first step was to define, together with the board of directors, the composition of the group responsible for leading the project, namely: Adriana Balbo (Supervisor of the collections department), Barbara Galhardo (Funeral Services Supervisor), Jessica Rapcham (Legal Director), and Priscila Fernandes (Human Resources Coordinator). In addition to these, the group also included the company's partner and service provider Felipe Nogueira (Head of Information Systems), under the general supervision of our Executive Director, Lilian Vivan.

This group also benefited from the occasional collaboration of other invited managers, such as the Sales and Marketing Department Coordinator, the Information Technology Department Supervisor, and the Finance Department Supervisor.

From that point on, with the creation of the WhatsApp group—designed to facilitate the sharing of ideas, opinions, and suggestions—important decisions regarding began to take shape, serving as an excellent opportunity to foster interaction among those involved in the project.

WHATSAPP GROUP – ACADEMIA ALLAMANDAS ORGANIZATION COMMUNICATION OF DECISIONS FOR THE PROJECT (See supporting documentation – FIGURE 2)

WHATSAPP GROUP – ALLAMANDAS ACADEMY ORGANIZATION STAGES IN THE SELECTION OF UNIFORMS, MATERIALS, ETC. (See supporting documentation – FIGURE 3)

Following the methodological framework, the syllabus and the development of the course content were also defined, which included subjects focused on:

- Company Presentation
- Customer Service
- Business Communication
- Personal and Professional Development
- Fundamentals of Management
- Financial Management
- Emotional Intelligence
- Marketing and Sales
- Introduction to the Funeral Industry
- Human Resources (Resume Preparation).
- IT (Windows, Word, Excel, and Artificial Intelligence)

To ensure the project's success, presentation and alignment meetings were held with all employees in early November 20, 2024, explaining the concept behind the initiative. During these meetings, personalized bookmarks from Allamandas Academy were distributed, along with a piece of candy, and our employees expressed their gratitude and enthusiasm for the opportunity that would be offered to their children and relatives.

PROJECT PRESENTATION TO EMPLOYEES (See supporting documentation – FIGURE 4)

BOOKMARKS, DISTRIBUTED TO EMPLOYEES (See supporting documentation – FIGURE 5)

Subsequently, online registration forms were made available for the selection of participants.

After the students were selected, 14 young people were approved and immediately received a warm welcome message from the project coordinator, Priscila Fernandes.

ONLINE REGISTRATION FORM AND WELCOME MESSAGE TO THE ACCEPTED STUDENTS (See supporting documentation – FIGURE 6)

In December 2024 and January 2025, the managers were involved in preparing all the instructional materials to be used during the classes, compiling a single workbook, and setting the class schedule, which consisted of biweekly sessions on Saturdays from 8:30 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. with a 15-minute break.

Once the standards for the Academy's organization and operation were established, on February 15, 2025, the project became a reality with the first class, during which the entire funeral complex was presented to the students. On that day, they received the materials free of charge: a handbook, a backpack, a uniform T-shirt, a welcome letter, and daily supplies, with classes continuing through August 2, 2025.

MATERIALS FOR USE DURING CLASSES HIGHLIGHT: WELCOME LETTER (See supporting documentation – FIGURE 7)

FIRST DAY OF CLASS: DISTRIBUTION OF MATERIALS TO STUDENTS (See supporting documentation – FIGURE 8)

The beginning of the course focused on welcoming young people, self-awareness, and building relationships. Subsequently, activities were conducted to develop social-emotional skills, such as communication, empathy, teamwork, and responsibility. In the final months, technical and professional training took center stage, with mock interviews, resume writing, and practical guidance on workplace behavior. Throughout the process, best practices were maintained, such as actively listening to participants, providing continuous support, and valuing each young person's individual journey.

FIRST CLASS DAY: INTRODUCING PARQUE DAS ALLAMANDAS (See supporting documentation – FIGURE 9)

It is important to note that to mark the completion of this significant project, the company held a graduation ceremony on September 12, 2025, attended by the students, their families, involved managers from, and invited partners, during which the efforts and achievements of the first class of the Allamandas Academy were celebrated.

INVITATION: GRADUATES OF THE ALLAMANDAS ACADEMY (See supporting documentation – FIGURE 10)

Unlike conventional training programs, the Allamandas Academy was designed to take place within the company's own structure, utilizing spaces, resources, and, above all, practical knowledge of its professionals. This approach not only optimizes resources but also ensures that the content is aligned with the real needs of the market, delivered by those who experience daily the situations that young people will encounter in their future careers. It is, therefore, a project that prioritizes social responsibility, combined with the strengthening of organizational culture and a commitment to the social, environmental, and economic transformation of the region in which it operates.

CLASSROOM PROVIDED FOR TEACHING (See supporting documentation – FIGURE 11)

Throughout the classes, the students' progress was evident, and proof of the project's effectiveness and contribution was the direct hiring of two young participants for junior apprentice positions at the company. It should be noted that the hired students competed with other external candidates but stood out in the interviews, where we observed the practical application of the lessons learned in class.

THAINÁ RIBEIRO REZENDE – ADMITTED ON: 04/17/2025 ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENT OF PARQUE DAS ALLAMANDAS (See supporting documentation – FIGURE 12)

HELOISA MARTIS BERTONCINI – ADMITTED ON: 04/28/2025 CUSTOMER SERVICE DEPARTMENT OF PARQUE DAS ALLAMANDAS (See supporting documentation – FIGURE 13)

Other students began their professional careers at other companies, noting how essential the project was to their success in their first job.

STUDENT: ADANY EUGENIO DO NASCIMENTO EXTERNAL ADMISSION – YTICON GROUP (See supporting documentation – FIGURE 14)

Our goal is to contribute to the employability of up to 50% of trained students within two years. By 2025, we had already reached 43% of this target, helping six students enter the job market.

These results demonstrate the project's effectiveness in preparing qualified professionals aligned with market needs. The hiring of these students has inspired others, their families, and local residents, showing that the company's investment has translated into real opportunities, income, and dignity.

As a positive consequence, in addition to the results already highlighted, the initiative is also characterized by its ease of implementation and high adaptability. Its structure allows it to be replicated on different scales, adjusting to the resources and reality of each interested company or unit.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the Allamandas Academy project is deeply aligned with the company's sustainability and corporate social responsibility guidelines, acting as an active agent in education and social transformation. It adopts a sustainable management model, with a strong alignment between its learning objectives and the conscious use of available resources. With a lean team, minimal operating costs, and classes conducted by our managers at the company's own facilities, the project becomes highly sustainable and enduring.

The idea also stands out for its systemic and collaborative approach, involving managers, employees, suppliers, and external partners as key players. After each class, feedback is collected from students and instructors to improve the course format and content.

Furthermore, Allamandas Academy aims to generate a real and lasting social impact in the surrounding communities by strengthening social bonds, broadening horizons, and contributing to the building of a more just and inclusive future through access to quality courses and career guidance. With this in mind, for the Academy's upcoming classes, the company's medium-term goal is to expand the project's reach to underserved communities in Londrina and the surrounding region, where we already operate with the help of monthly donations, continuing its social mission.

Although it is a project with a social and educational focus, it has also generated significant and positive environmental impacts. The initiative uses special teaching materials to encourage environmental responsibility. As a practical example of conscious consumption, students received pencils with seeds at the tip, which, when planted, inspire care and ecological awareness. The backpack provided, known as an "eco bag," is made from recycled materials, reinforcing the project's commitment to sustainability.

PENCIL WITH SEEDS AT THE END AND "ECOBAG" (See supporting documentation – FIGURE 15)

The initiative also encouraged appreciation for the local ecosystem by giving students plant seedlings on the second day of class, encouraging them to plant and care for them, symbolizing the students' own development throughout the course.

PLANTS GROWN AND CARED FOR BY THE STUDENTS DURING THE COURSE (See supporting documentation – FIGURE 16)

Finally, by empowering more conscious citizens, the Allamandas Academy plants seed of transformation—not only social but also environmental—as the young people who participate in the project will carry forward principles of efficient resource use, ecological responsibility, and care for the environment.

Regarding economic and financial impact, the project's implementation costs are low, as mandatory items are limited to teaching materials and a snack during the break. Elements such as uniforms or digital learning platforms are optional. This combination of low cost and high flexibility makes the Allamandas Academy accessible and highly replicable for companies of all sizes and sectors.

Prioritizing social impact, the project also reduces hiring costs by facilitating the creation of a resume database for future opportunities, targeting young people who are qualified to join the company's workforce in the future. This strategy also contributes economically to:

- Strengthening the bond between the company and its employees by valuing their families;
- Stimulating organizational engagement by reinforcing the institutional culture;
- Promoting the development of managers and employees who serve as volunteer instructors, expanding their skills in leadership, communication, and collaboration;

- Reducing costs associated with external recruitment processes
- Minimizing the learning curve for new hires

Factors that led to greater operational efficiency and optimization of financial resources.

The Allamandas Academy was also an innovative internal project, representing Parque das Allamandas' first educational initiative focused on the external community and mobilizing managers, employees, and partners to contribute their practical knowledge.

Preparing for the courses stimulated the creativity of the volunteer instructors, who developed presentations designed to address the topics in a playful, engaging way, linking concepts to the students' development. This allowed the instructors to immerse themselves in the world of young people and adolescents, fostering interactions and learning through classroom activities and leadership.

EXAMPLE OF A CLASS PRESENTATION: COURSE: CUSTOMER SERVICE and COURSE: FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT (See supporting documentation – FIGURES 17 and 18)

For these volunteer instructors, the project offered valuable learning about how to address topics and understand the questions, aspirations, expectations, and challenges of the next generation of professionals.

The involvement of strategic partners, such as GERAR (Generation of Employment, Income, and Support for Regional Development), was fundamental, as professionals specializing in entry and inclusion in the job market shared guidance with students on how to land their first job, highlighting essential aspects for success in interviews.

It is worth noting that the Human Resources department, following the completion and graduation of the course, will continue to support students throughout their journey until they enter the job market, overseeing their referral to the GERAR Project.

GERAR GROUP LECTURE - EMPLOYABILITY WORKSHOP (See supporting documentation – FIGURE 19)

The participation of psychologist Jaqueline Gaspar da Silva Maeoka, invited as a speaker, offered insights on behavior and emotional intelligence, emphasizing to the young people the importance of adopting responsible attitudes—qualities often undervalued among younger generations who do not view their first job as an opportunity for professional growth.

LECTURE BY PSYCHOLOGIST JAQUELINE GASPAR MAEOKA BEHAVIOR AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (See supporting documentation – FIGURE 20)

In addition to these, we also had the active participation of service providers, one of whom was Mr. Felipe Nogueira, as mentioned earlier, who taught important Excel classes and even addressed current topics such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) to the young people.

These factors reinforced the idea that the project's success lies in collaboration among different social actors.

After the completion of the first class, reviewing the planning and goals set during the formulation of the Allamandas Academy, we can conclude that the project not only achieved the expected results but, in many aspects, exceeded them. One of the first positive indicators was the high rate of participation and retention of young people in the activities, which demonstrated their interest and ongoing engagement.

These facts were demonstrated by the students in the practical workshops, group dynamics, and simulations of real-life situations, where the mentoring sessions were received with enthusiasm.

This was reflected in the strengthening of the participants' sense of responsibility, interpersonal communication, and ethical conduct through pair work or teamwork, as we challenged the students themselves to engage in experiences from a company's daily operations, such as:

- Simulating the types and behaviors that characterize customers, as covered in the Customer Service course.

- Practicing elements of persuasion and conviction, as part of the Customer Service and Retention class.
- Demonstrating and presenting the benefits and qualities of a product, as part of the Marketing and Sales course activities.
- Present a variety of topics related to personal resourcefulness and teamwork as part of a Business Communication exercise.
- Practice and presentation of practical experiments using Artificial Intelligence.

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND RETENTION ACTIVITIES (See supporting documentation – FIGURES 21 and 22)

CORPORATE COMMUNICATION AND MARKETING AND SALES WORKSHOP (See supporting documentation – FIGURES 23 and 24)

The first edition of the Allamandas Academy established itself as a milestone in the integration of social responsibility, human development, and the strengthening of organizational culture. The results obtained, combined with the impacts observed both at the individual level among the youth and at the collective level within the community, demonstrate that the initiative transcends the scope of training, emerging as a true instrument of social transformation.

Furthermore, spontaneous reports from the young people and their families, as well as data collected from student evaluations at the end of the course, pointed to significant behavioral changes, such as increased self-confidence, improved discipline, and the development of a more positive and planned outlook on the future.

Many participants stated that they began to envision a future with new professional opportunities.

FINAL PROJECT EVALUATION: STUDENT KAWANY SOARES DE PAULA (See supporting documentation - FIGURE 25)

At the institutional level, the project stood out as an initiative aligned with the company's values, strengthening its social role and its image as a promoter of citizenship and human development.

Recognition from employees, partners, and the community is a direct reflection of the seriousness and consistency of the work carried out.

The success of this first cohort establishes a solid foundation for the program's continuity and expansion, positioning the Academy as a sustainable, replicable initiative with a lasting impact.

STUDENTS AND VOLUNTEER TEACHERS GRADUATION OF THE 1ST CLASS OF THE ALLAMANDAS ACADEMY - SEP/2025 (See supporting documentation – FIGURE 26)

More than just training professionals prepared for the challenges of the job market, the project has proven capable of inspiring new perspectives for the future, reaffirming Parque das Allamandas' commitment to generating not only economic value, but also social and human value.

Duksa Family Funeral Homes, Newington, Connecticut

Duksa Family Funeral Homes, New Britain, Connecticut

A teacher at our local high school reached out to us to make a presentation to his class called "Death and Dying". He teaches a course named "Family Life. Throughout this course, his students learn about practical subjects to benefit them as they grow into young adults and beyond. They learn about human growth, relationship building and personal development. They learn about personal finances, sex education, raising a child and other life skills for managing a future home and taking care of a family.

We served this teacher's family when he recently lost his ex-wife. The grief and pain that came with her death for him and his children was overwhelming. Her loss was devastating to their circle of family and friends. As time passed, he recognized the importance of being prepared for life's losses and decided to introduce this program into his curriculum. In order for us to prepare adequately and fully understand what he was teaching, he provided us with a breakdown of what areas he had covered with the students, as well as what was going to be covered throughout the remainder of the semester.

Using this information, we prepared a slide show, talked frankly about funeral services and options for disposition. We talked about meaningful funerals and the importance of creating a service that honors a loved one yet helps survivors begin their grief journey. We covered cemetery information, different types of disposition, answered questions about embalming. We explained funeral service licensing education and requirements and shared information about pre-planning and its benefits. We brought in catalogues and pamphlets for review. We passed around keepsake urns, cremation jewelry and Parting Stones, and answered a myriad of very thoughtful questions.

He is now inviting us to come to speak to his class twice a year, once during each semester. The presentation is now enhanced because now he has his students prepare their questions in advance. He also is inviting parents to join their children for the class.

Denise Verner, our Director of Funeral Service Operations, is our representative and presents to this class each time. She invites one of our newly licensed funeral directors. It has given them the chance to answer questions and it also has allowed them to understand what is in the minds of young high school students regarding death and funerals. We believe that opportunity will better prepare them to service families with children of this age as they deal with death.

We also feel that being part of the high school community in this way allows teachers and administrative staff to know that we are available and willing to offer information to students and others in our community. Now that parents are invited to attend, we also feel that our presence gives parents a better idea of who we are and how we may be able to help should they need us in the future.

Edwards Funeral Service, Marion, Ohio

Families First Cremation and Burial At Edwards, Columbus, Ohio

Saturday with Santa

At Edwards Funeral Service, we believe our responsibility to the community extends beyond serving families during times of loss. One of the most successful examples of this commitment is our annual Saturday with Santa event, held each year on the first Saturday of December. This free community event provides local families with an opportunity to gather, celebrate the holiday season, and create lasting memories in a welcoming and festive environment.

The rationale behind the program is simple: funeral homes are uniquely positioned to serve as centers of community connection. While our primary mission is helping families navigate difficult times, we also recognize the importance of supporting families during life's joyful moments. The holiday season can be both meaningful and challenging for many individuals. By offering a family-focused event that is free and accessible to everyone, we create opportunities for positive community engagement while reinforcing our commitment to serving families throughout every stage of life.

During Saturday with Santa, families are invited to visit our funeral home for a morning of holiday activities. Children have the opportunity to meet Santa Claus, share their Christmas wishes, and have professional photographs taken with him. Each child receives a special Christmas gift, and families are encouraged to spend time together enjoying the festive atmosphere. The event transforms our facility into a place of celebration and joy, allowing many community members to experience the funeral home in a setting that is welcoming, comfortable, and family-oriented.

The program provides significant benefits to both our staff and our funeral home. Staff members have the opportunity to interact with community members in a positive, non-traditional setting, helping build stronger relationships and increasing visibility within the communities we serve. The event fosters teamwork among employees, who work together to plan, organize, decorate, and host the program. It also allows our staff to demonstrate our organization's values of compassion, service, and community involvement outside of funeral arrangements.

The benefits to families and the community are equally meaningful. Saturday with Santa provides a free holiday experience that many families look forward to each year. Children enjoy the excitement of meeting Santa and receiving gifts, while parents and grandparents appreciate the opportunity to create cherished holiday memories. The event also helps strengthen community connections by bringing together families from throughout the area in a welcoming environment.

Over the years, the program has continued to evolve. Recent improvements have included enhanced holiday decorations, expanded gift selections for children, improved photography opportunities, and increased promotion through social media and community outreach efforts. These enhancements have resulted in greater attendance and increased community engagement, allowing the event to reach more families each year.

Saturday with Santa has become a beloved annual tradition and a reflection of Edwards Funeral Service's commitment to serving our community beyond funeral service. By creating opportunities for families to gather, celebrate, and build lasting memories, we continue to strengthen our connection to the communities we are privileged to serve while demonstrating that funeral homes can play an important role in enhancing the quality of life for local families.

Elton Black & Son Funeral Home, White Lake, Michigan

Elton Black & Son Funeral Home, Highland Township, Michigan

On May 2, 2026 Elton Black and Son Funeral Home in conjunction with Walled Lake Northern High School, Oakland County Sheriff's Department and the Commerce Fire Department executed a staged accident with students, staff and teachers to promote the devastating effects that drinking and driving can have.

The mock car crash event is treated like a real emergency showing the minute-by-minute impact of drinking and driving. The Junior and Senior classes are brought outside to watch the demonstration. Real cars that had been previously damaged in accidents are brought in and staged in front of the high school the day before the event. On the day of the event, student actors are staged in the area, around, on and in the cars. The sheriff's department responds to the accident first, followed by the Fire Department and EMS crews and lastly the funeral home. After the police, fire department and medical crews assess the scene, the funeral home is called in to remove the deceased students from the scene. We use our hearse and our transfer van as well as our own staff for the demonstration.

The deceased students are placed on our stretchers, loaded in the vehicles and driven away to another area of the school away from the assembly of students viewing the reenactment. One of the teachers plays the role of the deceased student's mother and runs up to the hearse crying. In the background a student is narrating the story of a group of seniors leaving the prom after drinking, ending up in the accident and the devastation left behind.

The students that died in the accident are removed from school for the rest of the day and their obituaries and photos are posted in the school for the other students to read. This event has a huge impact on the students watching it. It is very realistic. The students acting in the mock car crash event use old prom dresses and suits covered in fake blood. This year there were 9 students that passed out while watching the event.

The local news station also came out to film the event and it was broadcast on the evening news in the Detroit area. It takes a lot of work, meetings and rehearsal to make this event successful. This event also gives us the opportunity to work with our local school, the sheriffs department and the fire department to strengthen the bonds and relationships we have in the community.

Families First Funeral Care & Cremation Center, Savannah, Georgia

"We've Got Your Back" created by Families First Funeral Care & Cremation Center

Families First Funeral Care & Cremation Center has developed a community outreach initiative called "We've Got Your Back." This annual program is designed to provide backpacks and school supplies to local children who have experienced the loss of a loved one. Our goal is to support grieving children and give back to the families who have entrusted us with the care of their loved ones.

At Families First, we are committed to being present for our community, especially during times of loss. This project reflects our dedication to supporting families beyond the funeral service by helping children navigate challenges associated with grief while ensuring they have the resources needed for academic success.

As part of the "We've Got Your Back" initiative, we promote the program through community flyers and social media campaigns. These announcements inform residents that we are accepting donations of backpacks and school supplies for local children that have lost a loved one. Families First Funeral Care & Cremation Center serves as the official collection site for all donated items. Promotional materials includes a list of suggested donations, such as backpacks, pencils, crayons, markers, notebooks, paper, glue, and other essential school supplies.

This initiative benefits both the community and our organization. It allows us to strengthen our connection with local families while demonstrating our commitment to service and compassion. Our staff is dedicated to supporting those in need, and we believe this program will further establish Families First as a trusted community partner while providing meaningful assistance to children during difficult times.

The community will also benefit from the opportunity to come together in support of children facing hardship and loss. By providing essential school supplies, we can help alleviate some of the burdens families may experience and ensure that children have the tools they need to succeed in school.

We are proud to partner with Camp Aloha, a week-long camp that serves children who have experienced the death of a loved one sponsored by our friends at Hospice Savannah. Through this partnership, Families First collects donated backpacks and school supplies and delivers them to Camp Aloha for distribution. This collaboration allows us to extend our impact and further our mission of promoting both emotional healing and educational success.

"We've Got Your Back" is conducted annually in partnership with Camp Aloha. We are grateful for organizations that provide essential support to grieving children and families. Through this initiative, we hope to strengthen relationships within our community, engage local businesses and residents, and make a lasting difference in the lives of children who need encouragement and support.

For our inaugural backpack drive, our goal is to collect and donate as many backpacks and school supplies as possible, ensuring that every child served through this program receives the resources they need to begin the school year with confidence and hope.

Jones-Wynn Funeral Homes & Crematory, Villa Rica, Georgia

Jones-Wynn Funeral Homes & Crematory, Douglasville, Georgia

For more than 76 years, our funeral home has believed that serving a community extends far beyond the families we care for during times of loss. It means showing up for life's celebrations, supporting the next generation, and investing in the people who make our hometown special. One of the most meaningful examples of this commitment took place during our local high school's historic football playoff season.

Each year, Jones-Wynn Funeral Homes & Crematory proudly sponsors the Villa Rica High School Wildcats through stadium advertising, community support, and spirited traditions such as providing cowbells for fans to cheer on our team. This past season, however, we wanted to do something even more meaningful.

When the Wildcats earned a place in the state playoffs, they faced an extraordinary challenge—a six-hour trip across Georgia for one of the biggest games in school history. Knowing the long journey ahead, Scott and Ellen McBrayer wanted every player, coach, and staff member to leave feeling encouraged and supported by the community that had been cheering them on all season.

On behalf of Jones-Wynn Funeral Homes & Crematory, we hosted a pre-travel meal for the entire team the evening before they departed. It provided an opportunity for players, coaches, and volunteers to gather, relax, and enjoy time together before the long road ahead. In addition, we prepared travel bags filled with snacks and drinks so each student-athlete had something to enjoy during the six-hour bus ride. While the meal and snacks were appreciated, the greater message was simple: your hometown believes in you.

What made this year especially memorable was the way it connected generations. Throughout football season, our stadium video advertisement featured a nostalgic tribute celebrating the history of our funeral home and our longstanding relationship with Villa Rica. The video blended vintage photographs and clips from previous generations of our family with present-day images, reminding fans that while our profession centers on caring for families during life's most difficult moments, our commitment to this community has always extended into everyday life.

The Villa Rica High School athletic department partnered with our funeral home by coordinating the team's schedule and allowing us to participate in the send-off. Our role was to provide the meal, travel snacks, and ongoing financial support throughout the season, while the school created the opportunity for the community to rally behind its student-athletes.

The impact reached far beyond football. Players, parents, coaches, and community members shared how meaningful it was to see a local family-owned business continue a tradition of investing in the same school that previous generations had supported for decades. Our staff also found great pride in participating, reinforcing that our mission is not simply serving families after a death, but caring for the people of our community every day.

While many organizations sponsor athletic programs, we believe true community service means being present when it matters most. For 76 years, Jones-Wynn Funeral Homes & Crematory has stood beside the Villa Rica Wildcats. This playoff journey reminded us that whether we are comforting a grieving family or encouraging a bus full of student-athletes chasing a dream, our purpose remains the same—to serve our community with compassion, generosity, and heart.

Miller & Van Essendelft Funeral Homes & Crematory, Edenton, North Carolina

Miller & Van Essendelft Funeral Homes & Crematory, Hertford, North Carolina

Miller & Van Essendelft Funeral Homes & Crematory, Gatesville, North Carolina

There are many ways to talk about the death and dying process to both kids and adults, a lot of books, videos, articles, etc... If you wanted a six page booklet on how to talk about death and dying I am sure you could find one with one simple Google search. Yet, the thing that I feel like gets overlooked is what do you do after death? How do you keep living your day to day life that has now been changed forever. You have to find a new sense of normal. There are not as many tools that talk about what the afterwards looks like when you have lost someone important. This is why I decided to do a program to address some of these things. I found a trilogy of kids books about how to honor your loved ones memory and how to live life after. They were published by the New York Life Foundation. Each book goes over something a little bit different than the last. The first one acknowledges the difference in routine and how you can feel sad after all the events surrounding the death of a loved one kind of calms down. Each book kind of has a main topic about doing something that honors the memory of your loved one or that still provides a way to connect with them. What I did was create a story time for kids, the first three Tuesdays in May from 4- 5pm. I partnered with the local county library to set up a space in their community room. I also planned activities for the kids and had time for a question and answer session for the children or parents that were in attendance. We used Facebook to market the program to a wide variety of groups online. This program benefitted the funeral home as a whole because it showed community outreach for the kids. It also showed that we can cater to the parents as well. The staff also got a little reprieve during the day and was able to socialize with people in our community in happier circumstances than they would normally be talking to people about. This program benefitted the community because it teaches kids that while change can be scary there are many things that can be done to still think and have space for the loved one that has passed away. It also gave kids space to talk to their parents about what otherwise may be a difficult subject to approach. Giving the kids this space to be able to hold conversations while not in the midst of a tragedy is a valuable resource.

Moments Funeral Home, Lucedale, Mississippi

Moments Funeral Home, Leakesville, Mississippi

Book 'Em Kids: Building Trust One Story at a Time

We believe serving our community extends far beyond the walls of our building. Every day, we work alongside law enforcement officers who assist families during some of the most difficult moments of their lives. Whether responding to unexpected deaths, traffic fatalities, or other emergencies, our relationship with local law enforcement is built on trust and compassion. Recognizing the growing need to strengthen relationships between children and law enforcement, we developed an innovative community outreach program called Book 'Em Kids.

The idea behind Book 'Em Kids was simple but impactful: use the power of storytelling to introduce children to law enforcement officers in a positive, non-threatening environment. Research consistently shows that young people's perceptions of police are shaped by their interactions with officers. Studies published by the U.S. Department of Justice have found that respectful, positive encounters increase trust and the perceived legitimacy of law enforcement, while negative interactions can have lasting effects on attitudes toward police. Likewise, recent reviews of police-youth relationships conclude that positive engagement during childhood is one of the strongest predictors of future trust and cooperation.

Book 'Em Kids is a TikTok-based reading program featuring local law enforcement officers reading children's books aloud. Officers from our county Sheriff's Office and the Mississippi Highway Patrol volunteer their time to participate, allowing children to see them not as strangers in uniforms, but as caring members of their community. New videos are released regularly and feature age-appropriate books that teach kindness, courage, honesty, friendship, and respect. Families can watch together from home, classrooms can incorporate the videos into reading time, and children can begin associating law enforcement with encouragement and learning rather than fear or uncertainty.

The funeral home's role extends well beyond filming the videos. Our staff developed the program's branding, created the Book 'Em Kids identity, coordinated schedules with participating agencies, handled video production, managed the TikTok platform, and promoted the program throughout the community. By utilizing our existing communication channels and community relationships, we transformed a simple idea into an ongoing public service initiative.

Our law enforcement partners played an equally important role. The Sheriff's Office and the Mississippi Highway Patrol recruited officers who were eager to participate, selected reading volunteers, and helped promote the program through their own social media platforms. Their willingness to step outside their traditional public safety role demonstrated a shared commitment to investing in the next generation.

The benefits to our funeral home have been significant. Families now see us not only as professionals who serve during times of loss but also as an organization dedicated to strengthening the community before tragedy ever occurs. The program has deepened our partnerships with first responders and reinforced our mission of serving families with compassion in every stage of life. It has also given our staff an opportunity to participate in a meaningful outreach initiative that reflects our core values of care, service, and community involvement.

The community has benefited even more. Children gain positive exposure to trusted adults in uniform, parents receive quality educational content they can enjoy with their children, and law enforcement officers have a unique opportunity to build relationships outside of emergency situations. By creating these positive first impressions, we hope to foster a generation that is more comfortable seeking help from law enforcement when needed and more likely to view officers as approachable members of the community.

Although Book 'Em Kids is still a relatively new initiative, the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Parents have shared that their children look forward to each new story, while participating officers have expressed how rewarding it has been to connect with children in such a meaningful way. Community

members have praised the partnership between the funeral home and local law enforcement as an innovative example of organizations working together for the common good.

Book 'Em Kids demonstrates that community outreach does not always require large budgets or elaborate events. Sometimes, meaningful change begins with a children's book, a caring officer, and a community willing to invest in stronger relationships—one story at a time.

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

Project: When Grief Touches Childhood: A Look at Childhood Grief and Families Who Lose Children

Introduction

Throughout our journey, we at Morada da Paz have developed initiatives that recognize care as a core value, especially during families' most vulnerable moments, such as the loss of a loved one. Supporting individuals through grief has always held a significant place in our mission, guided by our commitment to providing attentive listening, compassionate support, and an ethical presence in the face of loss.

In recent years, through our direct contact with the families we serve, the need for a more focused and specialized approach to childhood experiences of grief has become increasingly evident. One of the situations that most strongly calls for this level of care is the death of a child, an experience that profoundly impacts the entire family and challenges parents, siblings, grandparents, and other meaningful relationships to rebuild meaning in the face of such a significant absence.

At the same time, attention must also be given to children who experience the loss of important people in their lives. Although childhood grief has its own characteristics and is influenced by the emotional and cognitive stages of development, children do not always have access to appropriate spaces for expression, support, and understanding.

In both contexts, childhood occupies a sensitive, complex, and often overlooked place. These situations require specialized care, age-appropriate communication, and interventions capable of respecting both the child's emotional development and the unique nature of each family's grief experience. Grief involving children demands qualified listening, sensitivity, and an approach that acknowledges stories, relationships, and emotions that often remain unspoken.

Recognizing this reality, this project was created from Morada da Paz's desire to deepen its institutional focus on grief as it relates to childhood, expanding and strengthening the forms of care already available. The initiative was designed to address this subject in an intentional, structured, and compassionate manner, acknowledging its complexity and the importance of providing appropriate support both to families who lose children and to children who experience the pain of loss.

Introduction

The death of a child disrupts one of the most deeply rooted expectations of the human experience: the natural continuity of life. Socially, culturally, and emotionally, it is expected that older generations will pass before younger ones. When this order is interrupted, it gives rise to a unique, complex, and profoundly disorienting form of grief that affects families, relationships, and the wider community.

The loss of a child is widely recognized in the literature as one of the most intense and challenging forms of bereavement. It encompasses not only the pain of absence, but also feelings of injustice, guilt, helplessness, shattered dreams, and, in many cases, social silence surrounding the suffering of parents and family members. This type of grief requires qualified support, specialized care, and safe spaces for expression so that it does not become chronic or invisible.

At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge that children themselves experience grief. Bereaved children, whether mourning the loss of siblings, parents, relatives, or other significant individuals, express their pain in ways that do not always translate into words. Childhood grief often manifests through play, behavior, physical reactions, emotions, and developmental changes, requiring sensitive interventions that are appropriate to the child's age, developmental stage, and relational context.

In response to these realities, this project was developed as part of Morada da Paz's institutional commitment to expanding grief care by placing children at the center of both reflection and practice. The initiative seeks to provide focused support not only to families facing the loss of a child, but also to children who experience loss and need their grief to be recognized and validated.

To address the complexity of these experiences, the project was structured around two complementary pillars that interact with one another while maintaining distinct objectives and strategies:

Pillar 1 – Families Who Lose Children

This pillar is dedicated to supporting families who have experienced the death of a child, recognizing that such a loss represents one of the deepest, most complex, and often most isolated forms of grief. The death of a son or daughter profoundly affects parents and the entire family system, disrupting expectations, life plans, and sources of meaning.

Morada da Paz, which has a longstanding commitment to grief support, developed this pillar to provide a dedicated space for these families. The initiative is grounded in the understanding that parental and family grief following the loss of a child requires qualified listening, time, recognition, and validation. It emerged from the recognition that many families continue to carry their pain in isolation, without safe environments where they can share memories of their children, honor their stories, and express the impact of their absence.

Pillar 2 – Childhood Grief

In contemporary society, death and grief continue to be surrounded by taboo, silence, and avoidance, particularly when children are involved. In an effort to protect them, adults often avoid discussing loss, death, or grief, which can create confusion, misconceptions, and silent suffering.

This pillar is based on the belief that children can and should be included in conversations about death and grief, provided these discussions are conducted in a manner appropriate to their age, language, and emotional development. Normalizing these topics from an early age can help foster a healthier relationship with loss, encouraging emotional expression and a more comprehensive understanding of life and its natural cycles.

Through these two pillars, specific initiatives focused on care, education, and support were developed, all aligned with Morada da Paz's mission and its ethical commitment to providing compassionate, human-centered care to families experiencing loss.

Objectives

To promote qualified, compassionate, and ethical care in grief situations involving children by placing childhood at the center of institutional practices. This is achieved through support for families experiencing the loss of a child and through initiatives focused on helping children understand and cope with loss and death in age-appropriate ways, while respecting their emotional, relational, and developmental needs.

The specific objectives of the project are:

- To recognize children as central individuals within the context of grief, expanding the institutional perspective on the unique characteristics of childhood experiences of loss, whether the child is the one who has died or the one who remains.
- To enhance support for families grieving the loss of a child by acknowledging the singular nature of this type of bereavement, its emotional, symbolic, and relational impacts, and the need for specialized care and attentive listening.
- To provide sensitive support to bereaved children, respecting their individual ways of expressing grief, their developmental stages, and the relationships that sustain them.
- To raise awareness and provide training for professionals and teams regarding child loss and childhood grief, strengthening more compassionate and human-centered support practices that reflect the complexity of these experiences.
- To contribute to reducing the silence and invisibility that frequently surround grief involving children by creating legitimate spaces for listening, expression, and care.

- To strengthen the institution's role in the field of grief support by expanding projects, practices, and initiatives that integrate childhood as a fundamental dimension of family care.
- To align all project activities with the organization's core values, reaffirming its commitment to the dignity of life, humanized service, and comprehensive care during experiences of loss.

Methodology and Results

Axis 1 Action Proposal – Support and Listening Group for Families Who Have Lost Children

We offered a support and listening group, facilitated by a grief-specialized psychologist, for families who had experienced the loss of a child. The initiative aimed to create a safe environment for sharing experiences, recognition, and emotional support.

The group was open to:

- Families of Morada da Paz employees who had experienced the loss of a child, reflecting the organization's commitment to caring for its own team members;
- Families from the broader community, expanding the social and community reach of the project.

Three meetings were held during the month of May, chosen intentionally because it includes Mother's Day, allowing participants to establish connections, share experiences, and begin processing their grief while respecting each individual's pace and personal boundaries.

Meeting Structure

The sessions were conducted by a psychologist and grounded in a humanized and grief-sensitive approach, incorporating:

- Compassionate and qualified listening;
- A respectful space for open expression, free from judgment or pressure for solutions;
- Symbolic and reflective activities appropriate to the theme of parental grief;
- Encouragement of ongoing self-care, acknowledgment of personal pain, and engagement with support networks.

Although the group was not designed as a formal therapeutic intervention, it served as a meaningful space for support, validation, and recognition of grief, honoring the uniqueness of each family's story.

Among the participants was Anne Michelle, who lost her son, Luís Eduardo, nearly seven years ago. For her, the experience was transformative:

"I always believed I could handle this pain on my own, but I discovered the importance of having a space where I could talk about it. Hearing other mothers share similar stories made me realize I was not alone."

Mariana Simonetti, grief psychologist and creator of the project, explained that the initiative emerged from the need to acknowledge a form of grief that is often overlooked:

"We wanted to create a space that recognized these stories and told these women that their children existed and continue to have a place in memory."

Symbolic Memorial Product: Launch of the "Garden of the Little Ones"

As an extension of this initiative, Morada da Paz launched the Garden of the Little Ones, a memorial space dedicated to honoring the memory of children who passed away prematurely, including babies lost during pregnancy.

Inspired by a Japanese tradition that honors the memory of children, the space features ceramic sculptures symbolizing protection, tenderness, love, and enduring remembrance. Each participating family was invited to select a sculpture representing their child, creating a collective environment of memory and affection.

The sculptures were created by ceramic artist Marina Pantoja, who was involved in the project from its earliest stages. According to the artist:

“As I learned more about the project and the grief support work developed by Morada da Paz, I realized the responsibility these pieces carried. They would not simply be decorative sculptures, but symbols capable of representing deeply meaningful memories for each family.”

Following the launch event, the Garden of the Little Ones was made available to the general public. This decision expanded the project’s reach, ensuring that the tribute would not be limited to the original participant families. Any family could acquire a sculpture and dedicate a place in the garden to the memory of a beloved child.

As a result, Morada da Paz transformed the Garden of the Little Ones into a memorialization offering accessible to the community, supporting countless families in their grief journeys. More than a physical space, the garden became a public expression of recognition, compassion, and care, providing a symbolic way to honor brief yet profoundly meaningful lives.

Employee Care Initiative

As a gesture of internal support, Morada da Paz employees who had experienced the loss of a child and participated in the support group were offered a dedicated space within the Garden of the Little Ones, along with a memorial sculpture honoring their child.

This symbolic gesture represented:

- Institutional recognition of their loss;
- Validation of their child’s story and memory;
- Care for individuals who are not only employees but also grieving family members.

Purpose of Axis 1

Axis 1 reaffirmed Morada da Paz’s commitment to providing care that extends beyond funeral services. By offering opportunities for listening, remembrance, and symbolic tribute, the project helped ensure that families who had lost children did not have to endure their grief in isolation or invisibility.

Photographic records of the support group sessions and the launch of the “Garden of the Little Ones” are attached below.

Listening Group and Launch of the “Garden of the Little Ones” – Support Group Participants. Appendix 1

Listening Group and Launch of the “Garden of the Little Ones” – Ceremony for the Dedication of the “Garden of the Little Ones”. Appendix 2

Listening Group and Launch of the “Garden of the Little Ones” – Dedication Ceremony of the “Garden of the Little Ones”. Appendix 3

Listening Group and Launch of the “Garden of the Little Ones” – Ceramic Sculptures in the “Garden of the Little Ones,” Representing the Memory of the Children. Appendix 4

Axis 2 Action Proposal – Childhood, Grief, and Care: Playful Approaches to Talking About Death

The second axis of the project focused on children as individuals who can also experience grief and on the need to create more natural, sensitive, and age-appropriate ways of discussing death during childhood.

In Brazilian society, death is still a subject often surrounded by taboo, silence, and avoidance. When children are involved, this challenge becomes even greater. In an effort to protect them, adults frequently avoid explaining, naming, or discussing loss, which can lead to confusion, misconceptions, fear, and unspoken suffering. This project was founded on the understanding that children can and should talk about death and grief, provided these conversations are conducted using age-appropriate language, emotional sensitivity, and respect for their developmental stage.

To support this approach, Morada da Paz utilized Turma do Vilinha (Vilinha & Friends), its own educational initiative specifically designed to help children understand grief and loss through engaging and developmentally appropriate resources. Learn more at:
<https://www.oquefazeremcasodemorte.com.br/turma-do-vilinha/>. Appendix 5

Turma do Vilinha includes:

- Educational games;
- Children's books;
- Guided storytelling activities;
- Symbolic tools for emotional expression.

All of these resources are available through Morada da Paz (<https://www.oquefazeremcasodemorte.com.br/turma-do-vilinha/>), and are designed to help families and caregivers address death and grief in an accessible, respectful, and natural way.

Institutional Event – Activity with Employees' Children

As part of this axis, Morada da Paz organized a special event for the children of its employees, strengthening the connection between family, work, and care.

Held in celebration of Labor Day (May 1st), the event invited children and their families to visit and learn about their parents' workplace. This experience provided an opportunity for children to better understand the work carried out by their mothers and fathers and the purpose behind the services provided by Morada da Paz.

Following the workplace visit, the program continued with activities specifically designed for children, combining play, learning, and conversations about death and grief in a natural and age-appropriate manner.

The event included:

- Storytelling sessions and theatrical performances featuring Turma do Vilinha characters;
- Educational games and expressive activities;
- Opportunities for fun, laughter, and social interaction;
- Recreational spaces with toys, popcorn, and cotton candy.

The initiative also helped redefine perceptions of the cemetery as a place of memory, care, and affection. Many children arrived with preconceived notions associating cemeteries with fear or sadness. Through the experience, they were able to see the environment differently, as a welcoming, well-maintained, and meaningful space dedicated to caring for families and preserving memories.

Eulália, a ceremonial services employee, highlighted the importance of the experience for her family:

"It was a beautiful afternoon, and I felt truly valued by the company. My children and grandchildren always knew that I worked at the cemetery, but they had never seen the place. Coming here and realizing that it is not a gloomy or frightening environment completely changed their perception of my workplace. I am sure this moment will stay with them forever."

For Marcos, a funeral service agent, the event also provided a valuable family experience:

"It brought me great joy to spend this time with my daughter. With our busy routines, opportunities for lighthearted family moments are often limited. In addition to providing the children with an afternoon of learning and fun, the parents were extremely grateful for this opportunity to connect with their families."

Marina, a funeral services employee, emphasized the value of the educational approach used with the children:

"I was very impressed by the grief-related content presented through theater. Even though we are professionals who work with grief every day, we do not always know how to discuss these topics with

children in an accessible way. I was delighted by how educational, engaging, and meaningful the presentation was.”

By sharing this experience with their families, the children were encouraged to understand the work performed by Morada da Paz and to relate to the subject of death in a more human, approachable, and natural way. The initiative also helped them gain a greater appreciation for the important role their parents play as members of the organization.

Photographic Records of the Event with Employees’ Children at Morada da Paz

Institutional Event: Activity with Employees’ Children — The children’s arrival at the cemetery was marked by reunions with their family members in their respective work environments. In the first photograph, a funeral service agent welcomes his daughter and wife. In the second photograph, a ceremonial services coordinator greets her young daughter. The moment symbolized the connection between family, care, and professional recognition. Appendix 6 e Appendix 7

Institutional Event: Activity with Employees’ Children — The children enjoyed a variety of playful and educational activities organized by the recreation team, creating opportunities for fun, interaction, and learning in a welcoming and engaging environment. Appendix 8

Institutional Event: Action with Employees’ Children — The Grief Psychology team spoke with the children about the purpose of the event, the importance of their parents’ work, and the meaning of the cemetery as a place of memory, affection, care, and connection to the stories of many families. Appendix 9

Institutional Event: Action with Employees’ Children — A theater group performed a play inspired by the story of Dudu, a character from Turma do Vilinha, which addresses themes related to loss and grief in a playful, sensitive, and age-appropriate manner. Appendix 10

Institutional Event: Action with Employees’ Children — The children enjoyed recreational activities with a variety of games and attractions, promoting fun, social interaction, and the welcoming atmosphere that characterized the event. Appendix 11, Appendix 12

Institutional Event: Action with Employees’ Children — To make the experience even more special, the children enjoyed popcorn, cotton candy, and açaí, in a moment marked by joy, care, and a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere. Appendix 13

Institutional Event: Activity with Employees’ Children — Each child received a kit containing materials from the Vilinha & Friends grief support program, including games and other playful resources designed to help children understand and express their emotions in a sensitive and supportive way. Appendix 14

School Outreach Initiative: Raising Awareness About Childhood Grief in Educational Settings

In addition to the activity involving employees’ children, Axis 2 also included an outreach effort with schools in the city of Natal, Rio Grande do Norte. The Morada da Paz Grief Psychology Team visited two educational institutions and met with school counselors to present the Vilinha & Friends project, its educational resources, and its potential applications within the school environment.

During these meetings, Morada da Paz offered to provide, free of charge, training sessions for teachers and school staff on childhood grief, age-appropriate approaches to discussing death with children, and strategies for supporting students experiencing loss. The company also made its grief psychologists available to guide parents and students whenever schools identified such a need and considered the initiative beneficial to their educational community.

The experience revealed, however, how much resistance to the topic still exists. Even though loss can occur within school, family, and community contexts, the institutions demonstrated caution and reluctance when it came to addressing death and grief openly with teachers, students, and especially with parents. This reaction highlighted the fact that overcoming the stigma surrounding these subjects remains an ongoing challenge.

For Morada da Paz, this resistance reinforces the importance of continuing to promote dialogue, education, and support. Silence surrounding childhood grief does not protect children; rather, it can leave them isolated with emotions they do not yet know how to name or understand. For this reason, the company remains committed to serving as a reference in the field, providing specialized knowledge, professional support, and practical tools that help schools, families, and communities approach death with the importance, responsibility, and care it deserves.

Purpose of Axis 2

Axis 2 reaffirms Morada da Paz's commitment to emotional education, mental health prevention, and fostering a healthier relationship with death and grief from childhood onward. By utilizing the resources of the Vilinha & Friends project, promoting an activity for employees' children, and initiating partnerships with schools, the project expanded the reach of its care efforts, bringing information and support to various environments where children are present.

The initiative involving employees' children also served as an internal appreciation program, recognizing that the organization's commitment to care extends not only to the families it serves but also to its own employees and their loved ones. By opening its workplace to employees' children, Morada da Paz strengthened feelings of belonging, recognition, and professional pride, allowing children to better understand their parents' work in a more human, positive, and meaningful way.

The school outreach initiative, in turn, demonstrated the project's broader social impact beyond the organization itself. By offering free training, technical guidance, and educational materials, Morada da Paz sought to help schools become better prepared to support grieving children and address difficult conversations with sensitivity and care. Although the resistance encountered reflects the persistence of social taboos, it also confirms the need for initiatives that sustain this dialogue in an ethical, compassionate, and ongoing manner.

In this way, Axis 2 integrates care, education, prevention, employee appreciation, and community responsibility. It demonstrates that discussing death with children is possible when supported by appropriate language, qualified guidance, and sensitive resources. More than a one-time initiative, this axis represents a movement toward cultural transformation, helping families, schools, and communities understand that children, too, need support in times of loss, offered with honesty, compassion, and care.

New Comer Cremations & Funerals, Depew, New York

Our funeral home was honored to host a joyful and much needed pumpkin carving event for the students of Immaculate Conception School in East Aurora, an experience that became a true celebration of community spirit. Earlier in the year, the school had faced disappointment when a long standing autumn tradition was unexpectedly canceled by another funeral home. Because we had already built a strong relationship with the school through our involvement in their charity golf outing months prior and one of our staff members being a parishioner of the parish family, the administrators reached out to us with hope that the event could be saved. We immediately recognized how important this tradition was to the children and to the broader East Aurora community, and we committed ourselves to making it happen.

What followed was a remarkable display of collaboration, enthusiasm, and local support. With the help of school staff, parish volunteers, and our own team, we transformed the school cafeteria into a lively fall festival atmosphere. More than 100 children participated—far exceeding initial expectations. Apple cider, donuts and of course candy abounded. Students arrived with excitement, many wearing their school colors, and were greeted with rows of pumpkins, carving tools, and stations staffed by volunteers ready to assist. Laughter, creativity, and the unmistakable scent of autumn filled the air as children carved everything from classic jack o' lanterns to imaginative designs that reflected their personalities. Even the funeral home staff got into the spirit dressing in costume with our manager wearing his best pumpkin suit!

Parents and community members expressed deep appreciation for the event's revival, noting how meaningful it was to see a local funeral home step forward in such a positive, family centered way. For many, it reinforced the idea that funeral service professionals are not only caretakers in times of loss, but also active partners in building community traditions and supporting local families. Teachers shared that the children talked about the event for days afterward, proud to display their pumpkins and grateful for the sense of normalcy and celebration it brought.

By stepping in to restore a beloved tradition, we strengthened our relationship with Immaculate Conception School and reaffirmed our commitment to serving East Aurora with compassion, creativity, and community minded leadership. The success of the pumpkin carving event stands as a testament to what can be accomplished when local organizations work together with a shared purpose: to uplift, support, and bring joy to the families we are privileged to serve.

Twiford Funeral Homes, LLC and Albemarle Crematorium, Elizabeth City, North Carolina

Twiford Funeral Homes, LLC and Albemarle Crematorium, Manteo, North Carolina

Twiford Funeral Homes, LLC and Albemarle Crematorium participated in a "Mock Wreck" event on Tuesday, April 21, 2026 at Cape Hatteras Secondary School, just prior to the Saturday, April 25, 2026 school Prom. These events are organized by the group Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD), the school Guidance Department, Resource Officer, and teachers with the health and medical training classes. This enactment involved many members of the community to include; Dare County Sherriff's Department, North Carolina State Highway patrol, teen volunteers who pretended to be crash victims, Twiford Funeral Homes, LLC and Albemarle Crematorium, Dare County EMS, the firefighters from the Dare County Volunteer Fire Department on Roanoke Island, and a participant acting as a distraught mother who has just been notified her teen "died" on the way home from prom,

The "wreck" was staged to look as destructive as possible, and the cars donated for this purpose met the criteria. All the supporting players in this drama arrived in the correct order and proceeded to do all they could to "save" the teens involved. One victim was loaded in an ambulance to go to the hospital, while one teen did not "survive" the crash. The "mother" in the scenario was notified by a Dare County Sheriff's Officer. Twiford Funeral Homes, LLC was called, as a contracted medical examiner transporter and arrived on scene to take the "deceased" into care The volunteer "mother" wailed in the background. Displaying the care and sensitivity the profession is known for, David Van Essendelft and a coworker carefully loaded the young volunteer into the removal vehicle.

The group of teens observing this event seemed genuinely affected by the "loss" of one of their own. Even more, the volunteer playing the "mother" had a few of the young people tearing up at the thought that one of their parents might get that kind of news.

These types of multi jurisdiction efforts are integral to the sense of community so prevalent in Northeast North Carolina. With all the entities working together to share the potential reality of drinking, drugging, texting or simply distracted driving, every volunteer was serious about getting these points across. In reality, many of the volunteers were actually taking time out of their workday and putting extra work on their coworkers. because everyone involved believed so strongly in the message. This event also reminded all the adult participants of how precious life is, and how easily it can be lost in a moment of inattention or one bad decision.

These "mock wreck" events are held every couple of years, so as to not desensitize the communities to the negative effects of poor decision making.

This year, unlike in the past, the organizers decided to include a "parent" in the event. While everyone present knew this was a mock scenario, the extra touch of including a crying mother to the scene was very effective. It certainly brought home the very real possibility that one of their parents could receive a notification of death, if they made poor choices on Prom night.