

# Center Highlights

## *From the Founders -*



Big transitions are happening at the Center. After nearly 18 years of working together in developing every aspect of the Center, we both know it is time to move aside. All founders know this day will come, it needs to come. For us, this means stepping into an advisory position and supporting the work we have done in a less active role so that new ideas and energy can carry us into the future.

While this brings mixed feelings, nostalgia and all, we cannot begin to express how honored we are to have been in our roles and literally create something meaningful out of our simple passion to help people grieve their loved ones. We also cannot tell you how excited we are to announce that Emily Vincent, our current Clinical Director, will take the role of Executive Director by the end of December. Emily has been with the Center for 12 years and will introduce herself in our spring newsletter. We are very lucky to put “our baby” into her capable hands and have her continue what we started.

In looking back, we have deep gratitude to so many people. We have been supported by the most wonderful and dedicated staff. Their tireless commitment to our mission is evidenced by the fact that we have so many long-term employees. They have been the face of the Center in our community and we would not be who we are today as an organization if it were not for their talent, expertise and passion. If you hear great things about the Center, it is because of them. Thank you.

Our board, our donors, our colleagues... our heartfelt thanks for so many years of helping in various ways. Some of you have been with us from the beginning, supporting us quietly all this time. Having a network of people surrounding us has been essential to our existence. Your support has been our lifeline. Thank you.

To the clients we have served, thank you for letting us walk along side of you in your deepest times of sorrow as you have grappled with death and loss. Your perseverance inspires us every day and we are awed by the human spirit. We will always carry hope for you.

And in ways too many to list, the success of the Center could never have been birthed or grown to the level it has without the love and daily support of our families. Over the years, we have shared many transitions within our families; some were joys and some were sorrows but our husbands, children and grandchildren have allowed us to enjoy the life we have outside of work and at the same time, have energized us to return and do the sacred work we have valued all these years. Our thanks and love to each of you.

We remain dedicated and committed to the ongoing success and growth of the Center. Expect to see us around and feel free to reach out to us at any time.

*Shirley and Christine*

Shirley Elrod, LMFT, FT  
Christine Smith, MS  
Co-founders





Our staff is acutely impacted by this current and deteriorating scourge in our society. One cannot avoid being saddened and moved by ubiquitous reports in the media of the suffering of addicts as well as their loved ones.

The present opiate addiction epidemic has been fueled by a paradigm shift in the way people initially become addicted. Yes, heroin addiction still results from young people experimenting with “gateway drugs” which eventually progress to trying heroin. However, in recent years, a high percentage of people become addicted to heroin after dependence on prescription opiate medications. These people come from all walks of life, regardless of race, gender, age, ethnicity and socioeconomic circumstances. They typically sustain a benign acute injury, such as a toothache, sprained ankle, or chronic pain that necessitates a prescription of oxycodone, for example. It often doesn’t take long to gain dependency on such prescribed medications. Eventually, the patient has difficulty obtaining the medications or cannot afford to sustain their use typically due to expensive insurance co-pays, refill limits, etc. This often leads to purchasing the meds online or illegally, which also becomes expensive and problematic. Tragically, the patient turns to heroin which is much cheaper, stronger, longer lasting and accessible.

Heroin use immediately causes structural, chemical and psychological changes in the brain. Once addicted, if a patient tries to reduce or cease heroin use, severe withdrawal symptoms follow. Even with appropriate medical detoxification and rehab, the changes to the brain render the addict perpetually vulnerable to relapse. With continued use, the brain begins to associate almost any stimulus you can think of, e.g. finishing a meal, watching TV, feeling happy, feeling sad, etc. with getting high. These neural pathways strengthen over time, resulting in the inability to resist constant cravings. The brain also adapts by creating a tolerance, thereby needing more and stronger heroin to achieve the same effect. Despite the love and support of family, copious rehab attempts, Narcotics Anonymous meetings, etc., heroin addicts typically relapse.

Dealers know this. Therefore, in an effort to make heroin stronger, more addictive and marketable, it is being mixed with other extremely potent synthetic opioids, (fentanyl, carfentanil), making the “cocktail” more lethal and responsible for the current epidemic of overdose deaths.

As you might expect, the Center has been inundated with bereaved caretakers, family and friends of heroin overdose victims. The grief process for such people is uniquely difficult and complicated for several reasons. A primary aspect is the almost universal and pervasive feeling of regret, guilt and sometimes shame of the surviving loved ones, especially parents of the deceased. Under the best of circumstances, it takes months and years for the parents to reconcile, make sense of and understand “on a gut level” their ultimate powerlessness over their child’s addiction.

The difficulty is magnified tremendously for these mourners due to the fact that this grief is disenfranchised. Disenfranchised grief is one of several forms of complications described by Kenneth Doka, PhD (1989). Disenfranchised grief is not acknowledged or sanctioned by society, due in large part to the stigmatized nature of drug addiction itself. In essence, society continues to view drug addicts as “bad people”, who were raised in “dysfunctional families” who might have enabled them, didn’t give them adequate guidance or support or who otherwise “failed them.”

Our staff recognizes and understands the vexing nature of this disenfranchisement in our clients and is well trained to help. Stay tuned- more on disenfranchised grief in our next Grief Notes.

### Looking for Support?? - New Support Group for Loss due to Addiction/Overdose

Coping with grief following a death can be lonely, particularly when others cannot relate or stigma is attached.

In response to the growing number of bereaved in our community who are experiencing a death due to addiction or overdose, we have scheduled a new 6-week support group specific to this loss.

**Mondays, October 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 and November 6 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.**

- Open to adults at least 4 months beyond the death of a significant family member due to addiction or overdose.
- Screening and a registration form is required. This is not a drop-in group.
- Participant-generated discussions, facilitated by a staff professional specially educated in the field of bereavement.
- Group environment that promotes safe, respectful expression of feelings and sharing of experiences, information and coping strategies.
- Benefits may include: reduced feelings of isolation and promoting social interaction, validation, an increased understanding of self and providing an opportunity to be a support to others walking a similar path.
- Different from individual therapy, this group is strictly for support and connection with others.
- Affordable, low fee of \$60 for the 6 meetings (\$78 for couples).

**Call us at 610-222-4115 for more information. Registration is limited.**





# THE CENTER FOR LOSS AND BEREAVEMENT

Children's Bereavement Program - Nello's Corner



## Back to School for Grieving Children

September signals the end of summer and the beginning of a new school year. For the 1 in 5 children under age 18 who have experienced the death of someone close to them, returning to school may present some challenges. For the 7 out of 10 teachers who will have a grieving student in their class (New York Life Foundation), grief can affect a student's abilities and behavior in school. Creating supportive environments at home and school helps to ease what may be a stressful time for grieving children. Here are some ideas which can help:

**Talk to your child about informing new teachers and school counselors about the loss.** The effects of the death of a parent or sibling are life-long and children process, re-process and integrate experiences at various times. Sharing information can open avenues for understanding and communication between home and school.

**Establish routines.** The flexibility and change of summer schedules can make transition to school schedules challenging. Predictability of routine and preparation can provide security for a child and for the adults who teach and care for them.

**Observe, listen and provide space.** When children do not share what is happening or how they are feeling, it is common for adults to feel frustrated. Instead of directly questioning, watch, listen and follow their cues. Be open and prepared; when they are ready to talk, provide the safe space and time for them to do so. For some, having a designated periodic check in on the calendar at home and at school is helpful.

**Factual Information is essential.** Maneuvering the curiosity of peers and coping with sudden bursts of feelings often lead to an increase in questioning. Knowledge gives power and control. Children need to have adults they can trust, so be open and forthright when you are able.

**Allow for flexibility.** Establish plans for where a child can go if a break is needed; have a peer be a special buddy for a while; give a periodic pass, extension or alternate assignment if necessary. At home, determine what's most important and pick your battles.

**Develop sensitivity in language and assignments.** At school, grieving children may encounter triggers of their loss: references to "moms and dads", reading a book about loss, attending events where many families are present, writing a journal entry, having a "grandparent's day". Thoughtful planning and preparation by teachers can make all the difference.

**Gather additional resources.** Some children may show indications that more support is needed. Frequent absences, aggressive or destructive behavior, daily visits to the nurse, risk-taking behavior, sudden change in grades and persistent feelings are a few issues which may appear at home or in the classroom. Gather information in advance and seek additional resources if needed, including our Center.

## Back to Nello's Corner



Nello's Corner offers high quality peer support groups led by our staff of experienced grief facilitators. Children can feel less alone when able to connect with others in similar situations.

Our program resumes in September.

Tuesdays: 7-9 yr olds (4:30-5:45)  
9-12 and 13-15 yr olds (7:00-8:15)  
Wednesdays: 4-6 and 7-9 year olds (4:30-5:45)  
15-18 yr olds (7:00-8:15)

Registration is on-going throughout the school year.

**Call 610-222-4115 for more information.**







# THE CENTER FOR LOSS AND BEREAVEMENT

## Children's Summer Camp - **Camp Millie**

### **A Week of Building and Rebuilding!**

A child can feel as if things are falling down when a death occurs in the family. Camp Millie 2017 – **Under Construction** was designed to help lift up campers with interactive activities for building strong bodies, minds and spirits in order to help them cope with their losses. With the support of fellow campers willing to offer friendship and share ideas, the children were busy building all week! As a group, campers constructed several towers to represent the difference in their lives before and after loss. The final day, they rebuilt a very stable structure using experience, memories and skills, carefully laid on a foundation of newly discovered strengths. Each child assembled and decorated a real wood toolbox and filled it with grief tools to help with future times when they find themselves **Under Construction**. Our crew of staff, energetic campers and terrific volunteers had a great week of discovery, building upon the Center's mission of hope and healing.



### **Camp Millie is built upon a strong foundation of volunteers. Thanks to our 2017 crew:**

Karen Bottger, Emily Cauchon, Kate Doyle, Marissa Gleason, Jill Herman, Nancy Hunt, Jake Marron, Megan Marron, Tina Molitor, Robb Muse, Sonalee Panchal, Danielle Pellegrini, Carmen Phillips, Amy Ramsey, Steve Rasbold, Sandie Rollins, Joyce Saddler, Ricky Speer, Heather Tomes, Jen Toth-Pitcher and Kristin Vaszily.

Special gratitude to our Camp Millie Intern, **Eryn Greer**, **Laura Prior** of Beautiful Morning Day Yoga and **Walter Cherkas** of MuddySnow Productions for priceless contributions to Camp Millie 2017.

### **Additional appreciation to:**

**North Penn HS Tech Ed. class of Bill Waddington, 84 Lumber and SRG** for the extremely generous donation of supplies and preparation to make our toolboxes.

**The Michael H. Wise II Memorial Foundation** for continued sponsorship of our Camper T-shirts.

*The Foundation was founded to honor Officer Wise who died in the line of duty, June 5, 2004.*

**The Moylan Family and Team SuperSmile** from the Spreading Smiles Campaign for help defraying the cost of Camp Millie.

**Ellen and Dave Watson** for the much appreciated donation of gift towels and our water slide.

## WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST STAFF MEMBER!



My name is **Terri Lepitre** and my first exposure with the Center was as a trained volunteer. During my experience at Camp Millie I realized just how meaningful this work is and I was moved by watching the children and team members work so thoughtfully while still having such a good time. At that time I felt that I would like to be a part of this team one day and now I am honored to be able to work with people who are so compassionate in helping others with their grief process. In my life, I have experienced and continue to experience significant loss. This has taught me a lot about myself and others and the abilities we have to move forward through such intense pain, while finding a way to continue to love. We all need support to do this and I am very happy that I can offer this support with the help of the Center's resources and caring professional staff.

I am a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist having earned my Master's degree at LaSalle University and Bachelor's degree at Chestnut Hill College. I hold an active clinical membership in the American Association of Marital and Family Therapy and held a board position for the Pennsylvania Marriage and Family Therapy Association in years past. I am actively working towards continuing education to become Certified in Thanatology through the Association for Death Education and Counseling. My experience in the Mental Health field is comprised of a variety of clinical services including work as a mobile therapist, an outpatient therapist in both agency and private practice settings and a peer support group facilitator. In my role at the Center, I will be working with individuals, couples and families in offering deep understanding and compassion for the untimely death of loved ones and the grief surrounding any losses of life, health, or ability.

I am foremost a wife and mother of a son and daughter. I enjoy exercise, sunshine and nutrition rich cooking. I encourage these things for sustaining good mental, physical and family health.

### SEASONAL ADULT SUPPORT GROUP PROGRAM

Registration form and fee are required (\$60 for six weeks/months). Groups listed below are anticipated to have a fall start date. Please contact us for details at **610-222-4115**.

**BRAND NEW THIS FALL : Support for Loss due to Addiction/Overdose** - Six Monday Evenings  
October 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 and November 6 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.

**Adult Loss of a Parent** - Six Thursday Evenings

**Support for Loss due to Suicide** - Six Monday Evenings

**Mature Loss of Spouse or Partner** - Six afternoons

**Loss of Spouse / Partner** - Six Evenings for various ages

*Ongoing groups:*

**Monthly Loss of Child** - Ongoing registration. For parents who have experienced the death of a child as an older teen or adult. 2nd Monday of the month, September - July 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

**Twice-A-Month Young Adult Grief Support Group** - Ongoing registration. For men and women who are post high-school age – 29 years. **No charge**. Every other Wed., continuing September 6th 7:00 - 8:15 p.m.

### 2017 - 2018 PROFESSIONAL ROUNDTABLE TRAININGS

Our trainings are designed for professionals seeking a small, interactive learning environment. All are approved by the PA Board of Social Work, Marriage and Family and Professional Counselors for 3 CEU's.

**October 19, 2017 - Young Adult Grief:** Coping with grief in young adult years is often complicated by expected life transitions such as leaving for college or the military or embarking on independent work and family life. This training will focus on the ways in which this population responds to loss and what helps them.

**March 15, 2018 - Understanding Children's Grief:** This training will focus on the unique aspects of school-aged grieving children. What does their grief look like and how can we help them navigate their grief? We will address what they need at home and at school.

**April 26, 2018 - Case Studies in Complicated Grief:** What is complicated grief and what does it look like? We will utilize case studies to illustrate complicated grief and discuss interventions that may be appropriate. Many of our previous attendees have requested that we devote a training to case studies and we agree!

**Call 610-222-4110, ext. 104 for fees, information and to register.**



**The Center for Loss and Bereavement**

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