



Center Highlights

VOLUME 23, ISSUE 2 Fall 2023

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This June's Camp Millie theme was Riding the Waves, one of our team's favorites. Leaning into the ocean metaphor of grief with activities and discussions, our circles once again fostered new connections and hope in mutual support. Beyond these experiences with the campers and volunteers, the memories and fulfillment shared each summer through camp bring our entire team added inspiration and strength for mission work, as we turn the corner of one fiscal year into the next.

In this familiar theme, for the first time in Camp Millie's 18 years, our staff found ourselves riding our own waves of grief with two long-term beloved members of our team missing, Robb Muse and Gracie. While respectfully unique in role and impact across the Center and in the world around them, Robb and Gracie had some special qualities in common. Both touched the lives of many people through their service at the Center, and both brought a sense of calm and possibility into any room they entered. Their presence at Camp and in other corners of impact at the Center has been a constant for many of us who enjoyed their warm radiance and positive energy through the years. They are woven into the story of our Center, and they both are dearly missed.

In mourning these special members of our team, we have leaned into tools for comfort and continued bonds, as we encourage others to do. We have worn ribbons, lit candles, and dedicated signs in remembrance; we have shared hugs, stories, and tears. Most of all, we have found solace in carrying on the inspiring spirit they left each of us with personally, and with the many lives they uplifted at the Center. We are so grateful for the time, gifts, and hope Robb and Gracie shared with us and others. In support of each other and in continuing this compassionate, meaningful work, we feel their strength, along with that of so many others, by our sides and in our strides, always.



Emily

Emily Vincent, LPC, FT
Executive Director



In Memory

Since 2007, **Robb Muse** had been a treasured volunteer in our children and teen programs, Camp Millie and Nello's Corner. In recent years, Robb also joined our board, helping with added layers of strategic planning insight and generous fundraising support. We were devastated by his loss this past April, a few days after our team said goodbye to our sidekick and therapy dog of 10 years, **Gracie**. Gracie served alongside Claire Drexler, as the Center's second golden to join our offices and group rooms with her gentle, caring presence.



We are thrilled to announce the launch of our newly redesigned website!

We've given our online home a fresh and modern makeover to better serve our mission and community. Visit the new website at www.bereavementcenter.org and immerse yourself in the resources, inspiring stories, and opportunities to get involved.

WHAT'S INSIDE:

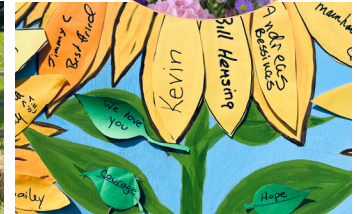
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Your Support Made Our Events a Success!

Thanks to the incredible support of many, our mission has been fueled through another year's **Strides of Hope** and **Fields of Hope** fundraising events! We are overwhelmed with gratitude for the uplifting presence of our community in helping raise awareness and critical financial support for the individuals, families, schools, and businesses who have experienced significant loss across our region.

This year we added new elements to our events, creating spaces for remembrance and reflection, allowing us to pay tribute to those who are no longer with us. Bearing witness to memorial photos, names, and dedication signs, along with inspiring messages and team sponsorships, it is clear that our mission has touched many. Hope played a tangible role through the connections and purpose of these events, maintaining bonds with those missed while helping the greater good. We are so honored to have witnessed hundreds of people joining together through these magical events, and we hope our supporters took away as much inspiration as they gave, and more!

Our fundraising goals achieved success due to the dedication of our exceptional Development team, the steadfast support of our founders, board members and sponsors, the creative efforts of our fabulous event committees, and many helping hands along the way! Please visit bereavementcenter.org/news-and-events for full event highlights, with immense appreciation to our sponsors, volunteers, donors and participants, all who make our work possible and extend our reach each year!



Capturing Hope and Community Spirit Amidst the Sunflowers!
Silver Orchid Photography, a local Skippack business, lent their talents and charming little blue truck to the Fields of Hope, adding charm and an unforgettable photo experience. With heartfelt appreciation, we thank their team for this blossoming partnership. Their extraordinary contributions resonate far beyond the camera lens as they plant seeds of hope within our community.



Thank you *Strides* OF HOPE Sponsors!



Thank you *Fields* of HOPE Sponsors!





Nello's Corner at a Glance



Nello's Corner is a peer group bereavement program for those who have experienced the death of an immediate family member. Groups for ages 4-19 and their caregivers meet from mid-September through late May, every other week on a Tuesday or Wednesday from 4:30-5:45 pm or 7:00-8:15 pm. Nello's Corner is offered at no cost to participants due to the generosity of donors. Families are invited to make a donation at any time.

Our outreach during the 2022-2023 school year:



120
participants



52
families



69
children



28
zip codes reached



18
school districts



Program Goals are to:

- Provide a safe place with opportunities for positive interaction with peers
- Foster connection with others to help feel less alone in grief
- Strengthen communication surrounding loss and grief
- Introduce grief coping strategies and skills
- Develop new understandings about grief and your unique journey

Favorite Activities

from Peer Groups ages 4-19 years:

- Memory box (continuing the bond)
- Basketball, air hockey (physical play)
- Pot breaking and rebuilding (grief connection)
- Using dissolving paper (feelings/release/change)
- Question games (problem solving)
- Clay Grief Monsters (feelings)
- Luminaries (memories)
- Soda explosion & balloons (feelings)
- S'mores around the fire pit (support/change)
- Creating and sharing music (coping)
- Chalk worry clouds (feelings/coping)
- Using the Hurricane Room to get energy out
- Body tracing of feelings

Frequently Discussed Topics

in our Adult Caregiver Groups:

- understanding youth behaviors and what they may be expressing
- collaboration with schools
- grief or age or hormones
- what to do for anniversaries and life events
- how to tell your child a challenging truth
- sharing and bonding over triumphs
- nurturing a support system

"At first I felt like it would be a hassle to have to take my child to group and to sit through a group of my own... It was so wonderful to be able to have open conversation with people going through similar situations."



THINKING ABOUT JOINING?

Here is what Nello's Corner children/teens want you to know:

- "You should try it"
- "Probably a good idea. Helps you not be so scared to talk about it"
- "It's a good place and you can feel safe talking about personal stuff because it doesn't go anywhere."
- "Nello's Corner is a lot of fun because there are a lot of activities and friends to talk to here."
- "Definitely come. It's really fun. You can let out your feelings in a fun way. Activities and talking make it great!"

Visit bereavementcenter.org/nellos-corner for more information or call 610-222-4110 and speak to our Intake Coordinator.

GRIEF COUNSELING UPDATES:

Our clinical team continues to support children, individuals, couples and families in an intimate, professional grief counseling setting. We are committed to providing quality care in exploring and processing the unique grief process of those who come to us.



Join us in celebrating our two newest counselors, Tammy Court-Cudd and Brian McCaffrey, on passing their board exams towards their longer-term goal of clinical licensure. Tammy is now a Licensed Social Worker, and Brian is one step closer to his License as a Professional Counselor. This is a wonderful accomplishment and confirms their foundation is strong as they grow with us. Congratulations, Tammy and Brian, and thanks to their mentors and Clinical Supervisors, Claire Drexler, Shirley Elrod, Rita Porreca, and Kendra Stenack who guide and support them in skillful work, everyday!

Please visit our website at bereavementcenter.org/counseling or contact our intake coordinator at 610-222-4110 for more information and to get connected with one of our specialized counselors.

WORDS EXPRESSING THE COUNSELING EXPERIENCE FROM OUR CLIENTS' PERSPECTIVES:



Specialized Adult Grief Support Groups



• How does a support group differ from counseling?

A counseling session provides support and guidance tailored to individual, couple, or family needs, led by a professional counselor. During a support group, time is shared with 6-12 others, providing the opportunity to listen to others and share your own experience, offering helpful insights and coping strategies from peers with similar losses.

• When is the best time to join a support group?

Individual circumstances influence when a person searches for a grief support group. It is recommended to consider how prepared you are to talk about your own loss, along with your capacity to sit with others' grief. Consider the give and take nature of peer groups and assess your ability to be an attentive, active member in order for you to benefit most from the process.

"I thought everything was done so respectfully and with compassion and care. We were all still so fragile and hurt due to our loss. We had a phenomenal facilitator and most of the time she just let us speak and express ourselves. She, of course, asked us questions and had a few topics for us to discuss, but for the most part she let us vent, cry and express our feelings in a very safe environment. The group members have become friends and we are there to support each other in the future."

• Is there a fee for participation?

Our support groups are facilitated by our Center's staff, specifically educated in grief and trained in group facilitation. There is a nominal fee for attendance.

• Can I drop in?

None of our support groups are drop-in. Only registered participants who are there to give and receive support from their own experience are able to attend. Many maintain long-term relationships with those they complete a group with, while others appreciate the short-term role they play in each other's lives.

"I had reservations about attending such a group but now I am glad that I did it. I felt (the group) bonded rather quickly and we were able to discuss our most personal feelings in a non-judgmental, caring setting."



ONGOING SUPPORT GROUPS:

Loss of Child for those whose child was an older teen or adult
2nd Monday of month, excluding August • 6:30 – 8:00 pm

Young Adult Grief Support for those ages 19-29
Virtual and In Person options
every other Wednesday • 7:00 pm – 8:15 pm (no fee)

UPCOMING 6-WEEK GROUPS:

Loss Due to Suicide – Mondays
11/13, 11/20, 11/27, 12/4, 12/11, 12/18 • 6:30 – 8:00 pm

Mid-Life Loss of Spouse or Partner – Thursdays
10/19, 10/26, 11/2, 11/9, 11/16, 11/30 • 7:15 – 8:45 pm

Adult Loss of Sibling, Mature and Younger Loss of Spouse or Partner, Loss of Parent, and Loss Due to Addiction to be scheduled pending interest.

Visit bereavementcenter.org/specialized-adult-groups for more information or call 610-222-4110 and speak to our Intake Coordinator.

Thank you

to the **Spreading Hope and Smiles Foundation** for the decorated flowerpots and Starbucks gift card coffee cups given as a token of caring comfort for grieving parents this Mother's and Father's Day. Dozens of our counseling clients and group participants were touched by this thoughtful gesture, and we were honored to be part of this special, generous partnership for a second year!





THE REVIEWS ARE IN –
Camp Millie 2023
“RIDING THE WAVES”
Was a Splashing Success!

Why do we offer a camp experience?

Let the campers tell you:

“It’s a really fun camp and good for kids who have had a brother, sister or parent die.”

“I loved it and learned from the counselors about dealing with grief.”

“I don’t feel bad having fun here.”

“My favorite camp of the summer; I don’t want Camp Millie to end!”



How is it beneficial?

Here’s what Caregivers have to say:

“The camp provides them with tools to help cope with their hurt and their feelings responsibly, in an effort to help them live on and thrive in the absence of someone so important to them.”



“He’s now more open about grief and the overall situation.”

“Camp Millie is an open and honest space where kids can be kids while also discussing hard topics. It helps create an environment where they don’t feel as alone as before.”

How does it happen?

A parent notes:

“It was obvious how much planning and behind the scenes activities took place that made the camp successful and run so smoothly.”



What happens at camp?

Our volunteers share some observations:

“...I loved the sharing in circle time (both large and small) as well as craft time and seeing the kiddos have such fun with the water balloons and on the water slide. “

“... It was really amazing to see the resiliency of the kids and the wisdom and insight that they brought to their experience, and it meant a lot to be part of something that helped them feel supported and that I hope stays with them!”

“I was so impressed with the changes from day one to day 4 with the kids and their sharing. Everyday just got better and better!”

“An incredibly moving and fulfilling week.”

“Being part of Camp Millie is such a heart-filling and life-affirming experience. It is an honor and a privilege to be a small part of something so special and to meet all of these amazing kids and see how they support each other!”



WAVES OF THANK YOU TO:

- Those who made monetary donations for Camp, including the Arcola Philanthropy and Charity Club
- The more than 40 individuals who purchased items from our Amazon Wish List and made donations to cover our well-loved waterslide
- The Michael H Wise II Memorial Foundation for sponsoring our camper t-shirts
- Jason’s Jumpers for our super fun waterslide
- Jake Marron for the establishment of our camper scholarship fund
- The 30 volunteers and teens who gave of their time and sweat(!) before, during and after camp: Sonalee Panchal, Jake Marron, Cynthia McCullough, Jill Gallagher, Becca DiCondina, Kelly Taylor, Kristin Hannings, Barbara Fischer, Becky Santosusso, Suzanne Miller, Jenn Romano, Ellie Smith, Matthew Reiger, Samantha Cava, Liam Zakarewicz, Melanie Vincent, Melissa Long, Joy Berkheimer, Deb Zabrodski, Jenn Oglesbee, Stefanie Kyte, Casey Interrante, Melissa Long, Graham Smith, Liz Tulig, Laura Pryor, Kristen O’Brien, Emelia Lockwood, Charlotte Vincent, Will Lockwood

For families looking for a specialized summer program for their grieving children: *“Camp truly gives kids permission to laugh, to smile, to cry, to receive support, and a chance to remember and say their loved one’s name out loud.”*

NEXT UP: **Camp Millie ROAD TRIP ADVENTURES • June 2024**



COMMUNITY *Connections*

Partners in Education and Advocacy:

This June, our Executive Director and Youth and Family Group Coordinator attended the National Alliance for Children's Grief annual symposium in Pittsburgh, bringing back knowledge, enriched relationships, and inspiration to our team. We are proud to be carrying forward the momentum from these advocates in research and practice, strengthening programs like ours that encourage healthy development for bereaved youth and families.



Emily Vincent and Christina Larkin with local partners in Childhood Bereavement Changemaker Projects from the Greater Philadelphia Grief Collaborative.

Outreach and Networking:

We regularly attend local health fair events to engage with and provide resources, information, and support to members of the community. This past year we attended Children's Mental Health Day at Elmwood Zoo, Upper Perkiomen Community Resource Fair, Towamencin Days, Victim Service Center's Empower-Palooza, Keegan's Touch A Truck Event, and the Matt Bradford Family & Health Fairs. We hope to see you at an event this fall! Please visit our table and leave a message of hope or name in memory, as well as learn more about the inspiring connections found through programs at the Center.



We have also enjoyed many occasions in networking with other professionals through The Greater Philadelphia Grief Collaborative, The Bucks Mont Collaborative, Interagency Council of Norristown (ICN), Suicide Prevention Taskforce, Montco SAP Council, The Montco Multifaith Coalition, and the Montgomery County Counseling Association (MCCA). We appreciate the opportunity to learn from other professionals in the area and partner with them in better supporting others so that we can better support our community as a team.

Last spring, our founders joined members of our board and staff at a local 'Night Out with Meaning', hosted by Teresa Rodgers of Harp-Weaver, LLC. Through this small gathering, our founder Christine Smith shared her personal journey through grief, and the inspiration that led to her and Shirley Elrod's building the Center as a resource for others. We were grateful to have been invited to spotlight Christine, Shirley, and the Center as beacons of light



Founders Christine Smith and Shirley Elrod.

Professional Education & Training



Our Team is committed to sharing specialized knowledge, support, and resources with our community. Our goal is to expand our expertise so that you can best support those around

you. We provide a variety of presentations and professional development opportunities throughout the community, to Schools – Agencies – Healthcare Networks – Faith-Based Organizations – Community Groups – Businesses. We are committed to tailoring our presentations to fit your unique grief-related needs.

Professional Education & Training: The Center is an approved Continuing Education Provider through the Pennsylvania State Board. We offer CE credits for licensed social workers, marriage and family therapists, and licensed professional counselors.

"As part of my college coursework in Gerontology, I took a course in death & dying that covered some of this content. But that was over 20 years ago. . . It's interesting to hear about how grief education and counseling has changed over the years. It seems like the new information is much less linear and much more workable in real life settings. Thank you for the refresher on this valuable information!"

Grief Psychoeducation Process Groups:

A hybrid grief presentation/discussion group is often requested following a loss within a network, group or business. A dual benefit of this process is strengthening a team of individuals while bolstering their ability to support others.

"Death and grief are very important topics for me. I have spent a lot of time thinking about them -- both in working toward healing my own grief as well as in caring for others in their grief... This is rich, spiritual, visceral territory and sharing in these conversations, led by a skilled facilitator, is a true gift."

Grief Awareness Presentations: We can offer an overview our services and grief-awareness for groups looking to learn more about our resources and the power of grief support.

Professional Networking / Consultations:

Hosting a staff meeting or professional networking group? Looking for more tailored information or support for your organization? We would be happy to partner with you, please reach out!

Visit bereavementcenter.org/grief-education-and-consulting for more information or call 610-222-4110 and speak with our Intake Coordinator.

Grief Notes: Ambiguous Loss

BY TAMMY COURT-CUDD

Dr. Pauline Boss, a family therapist and researcher, began work in the 1970's on a concept of loss that did not involve clear and tangible absences like death. The concept was coined ambiguous loss - which refers to a type of loss that is abstract, uncertain, and lacks permanency. Because ambiguous loss can be unclear, it is often unrecognized by others which makes it particularly challenging as it lacks the usual rituals and social support systems associated with more tangible losses. It can lead to feelings of confusion, grief, and a sense of being stuck as individuals struggle to make sense of an uncertain and unclear situation. Ambiguous loss is characterized as one of two types:

Physical Ambiguous Loss is when a person is physically absent but psychologically present. These are situations where the physical absence of a person is accompanied by uncertainty, ongoing attachment, and the absence of clear closure or resolution, leading to the experience of ambiguous loss. To name a few, examples of physical ambiguous loss include divorce/separation, adoption, missing person, military deployment, immigration/migration, and abandonment.

Psychological Ambiguous Loss is when a person is psychologically absent but physically present. These are situations where the psychological or emotional presence of a person is ambiguous or altered, causing a sense of loss and grief for their previous state and the challenges of navigating the changed relationship. A few examples of psychological ambiguous loss include severe mental illness, addiction, traumatic brain injury, dementia, and emotional distance/estrangement.



Understanding more about ambiguous loss and how to cope with the many challenges it brings can be helpful if you or someone you know is confronted with these uniquely complicated experiences of life.

Read our full article on this topic and view our library of other articles and resources through our website at bereavementcenter.org/resources. Share it with a friend, spread hope through awareness.

www.apa.org/news/podcasts/speaking-of-psychology/ambiguous-loss

National Council on Family Relations Resource List on Ambiguous Loss: www.ncfr.org/resources/resource-collections/ambiguous-loss-resources



Fall 2023 Adult Grief Retreat *...on the farm*

We welcome you to spend a day on the farm in the company of others as you reflect on your grief experience through creative expression, movement, and memorable connection.

Saturday, October 14, 2023
9:00 am *to* 3:00 pm

The Smith Family Farm
in Collegeville, PA

For more information, visit bereavementcenter.org/workshops or call 610-222-4110 and speak with our Intake Coordinator.

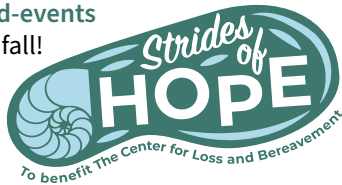
Please note that space will be limited and registration will require an initial screening, a completed registration form, and a nominal fee.



The Center for Loss and Bereavement
3847 Skippack Pike
P.O. Box 1299
Skippack, PA 19474-1299

Save the date!

The Strides of Hope 5k Walk/Run will be on **Saturday, April 13, 2024**. More details to come, follow our social media and our website at bereavementcenter.org/news-and-events later this fall!



The Center for Loss and Bereavement

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Did You Know...
that our Center relies on the generosity of individual contributions, unlike government-funded organizations? Your support powers our mission. Visit our website for ways to contribute and become a source of hope.
www.bereavementcenter.org/donate

Our Mission

The Center for Loss and Bereavement is a non-profit resource of specialized knowledge and professional support that provides meaningful connection and restorative guidance for those impacted by grief.

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