

heart strings

Spring 2017

A Newsletter for the Community from
The Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas

A Family's Story of Loss and Love

For most people, becoming a parent is a gradual process, with several months to plan and prepare before parenthood becomes a reality. This was not the case for Steve Garza, who almost overnight went from being a single person to being the father of three young children.

Sharing his story with those gathered for the 2017 Hearts In Harmony Gala, Steve began by saying, "I wish I had the words to express the level of gratitude I feel when I say 'Thank You'. You may never understand what your support for the Center means to me. As a beneficiary of the Center's services, I feel safe in saying that you truly are a blessing."

Steve grew up in a supportive, loving family that shared each other's joys and sorrows. He was close to his cousin Santos. So when she became seriously ill, Steve was naturally concerned about her, and about what would happen to her three young children should her treatments for cervical cancer be unsuccessful.

"These were not easy times for the kids. They truly did not understand what was going on. I have to admit, I did not either," he remembers. Santos was admitted to hospice during Christmas break 2012, and the children stayed with Steve during the holidays. Unfortunately, Santos declined rapidly. One morning Steve went to work as a single, childless, Division Coding Manager for

Methodist Healthcare; by the end of the day he was the soon-to-be adoptive father of three children, Rafael, Sylvia and Esteban, ages seven, eight and nine respectively.

Steve and the children struggled after Santos' death, even with lots of loving help from family. A friend at work told Steve about the Children's Bereavement Center and he immediately made an appointment. However, the new family's first visit to the Center did not go well. Sylvia was uncharacteristically difficult. She thought the Center would be similar to her school where counselors would call her into the office and ask questions about her mother's illness and the home situation.

"She did not want to experience that again, and I understood why," Steve remembers. "I couldn't imagine the pain and stress she was feeling! She was just an eight-year-old child, with no experience in how to cope, not to mention the anxiety of the unknown! I assured



Steve Garza and his children (r-l) Esteban, Rafael and Sylvia, now 12, 13, and 14 years old.

her the Center was not going to be that way and asked her to please give it a chance. She agreed, and when we went for orientation, she and Raphael left so excited they couldn't wait to return!"

Group discussions at the Center were especially helpful to Steve. "I learned I was feeling a lot of anger for Santos, her husband, her brother and sister. I was lost, and stressed, and trying to figure out what it meant to be a parent. I was insecure about my ability to care

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Going Green

Help us reduce printing, postage and other mailing costs by receiving paperless updates! Stay up to date on exciting news and events at the Center, as well as trainings and other opportunities available. Text CBCST to 22828 or visit our website at www.cbcbst.org and click on the "Get Updates" icon at the top of the page.

Shop for a Cause

Summertime fun is right around the corner! If you're looking for the best deals on patio furniture, swimsuits, camping equipment, pool toys, etc., there's no better place to find them than online! If you shop Amazon Smile, a portion of your purchase will come back to the Center to help support grieving families. Just designate Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas as your beneficiary when you log on to Amazon Smile. It's that easy!



Visit www.Smile.Amazon.com for more information and search for the Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas to designate us as your charity of choice.

Happy Summer!!!

Heart Strings is the community newsletter for the friends and families of



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Happy Birthday to Us!!!

Martha Atkins relieved her sadness at the death of her brother, by imagining a grief center in San Antonio just for children. In 1997, that dream became reality when she began offering peer support groups for San Antonio's grieving children. She started by offering one peer support group that served 19 families, carrying the materials she used for the groups in the trunk of her car, and borrowing space from different local churches for the group meetings.

Soon after its inception, the San Antonio community recognized the benefits of the program and joined together to help purchase a permanent home for the Center at 332 W. Craig Place. The program grew rapidly in its new home, and services were improved and expanded. In the early years of the new millennium, it became clear that the program was growing out of the house on

Craig Place, and the dedicated staff and enthusiastic Board of Directors began to search for a larger site that would allow the Center to continue growing and serving more families. They found an outdated office building that offered 10,000 square feet of "growing room" and set about raising the funds needed to purchase and refurbish the building into the lovely, welcoming "Home with a Heart" that it is today.

This year the Children's Bereavement Center is celebrating 20 years of service to the South Texas community – 20 years of providing children and their families with the support and guidance needed to rebuild their lives following the loss of a loved one. We are honored to serve the San Antonio and South Texas area and are looking forward to the next 20 years.



The first Children's Bereavement Center was an old home located on Craig Place.



Present day site provides more room for families.



Out Came the Sun is a guide for parents, grandparents, teachers – anyone who may come in contact with a grieving child.

Out Came the Sun

The Center is celebrating the achievement of another goal – the creation of a booklet that can be used by teachers, nurses, doctors, parents – anyone who comes into contact with - and wants to help - a grieving child.

Out Came the Sun is a labor of love that was two years in the making. Now a reality, the book is being distributed to schools,

hospitals, churches, pediatrician's offices and other organizations to provide useful information about how to support a child who is grieving the loss of a loved one.

Every year the Center provides grief support services for over 1,500 children and adult caregivers. However, there are many more grieving children in San Antonio and surrounding counties who need comfort, support and understanding. For every one of these children, there is an adult parent or caregiver who is struggling to meet the needs of the child, while coping with their own grief. *Out Came the Sun* is designed to help these adults by providing descriptions of appropriate grief reactions, warning signs to watch for, recommendations for how to handle different issues, referrals to on-line support and helpful books and publications.

"It is our vision to be able to serve every grieving child in our community," said Executive Director Marian Sokol, "But we know that is not realistic. We hope that by making this book available to as many people as possible, fewer children will find themselves walking the journey of grief alone, and more will be able to recover and lead healthy, productive lives."

Thanks to Editor Michele Stanush for her insights and recommendations, and the team at TradeCraft for their creative guidance. The first printing of the book was made possible by a contribution from the San Antonio Pi Beta Phi Alumni Association. Already underway, the second printing was made possible by the Porter Loring Family.

The Center hopes to distribute *Out Came the Sun* to organizations and individuals who would find it most useful. If you would like to receive a copy, please visit the Center's website at www.cbcst.org.

Staff Spotlight: Marcella Castro Garcia, MA, LPC



The Center is proud of the role it plays in training social work and counseling interns from local universities, and delighted when one of these students returns to the Center as a seasoned professional and new employee. This is the case with Marcella Castro Garcia, MA, LPC, newest member of the Center's staff.

Born and raised in Toledo, Ohio and Chicago, Illinois, Marcella served four years active duty in the United States Air Force, and another 19 years as the wife of an Air Force officer, living in Tennessee, California, and Hawaii, in addition to Texas.

Marcella received her Master's degree in Community Counseling from the University of Texas at San Antonio. Her clinical experience includes Jewish Family Service, Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas, and Laurel Ridge Treatment Center. In addition, Marcella served military families as a trauma therapist at Child Safe, and says, "As an Air Force veteran, I understand the challenges faced by service members and their families within the military community. I am dedicated to working with children and families, and assisting in the healing process after a traumatic event."

When not caring for the Center's clients, Marcella enjoys music and dancing. In fact, when stationed in Hawaii, she belonged to a hula dance troupe that entertained guests of the Hilton Hotel on Waikiki Beach. She is the mother of two young sons, who coincidentally, were born on the same day six years apart.

The Center extends a warm welcome to Marcella Castro Garcia!

New Collaboration Offers Anticipatory Support

For some time the Center has received requests to provide anticipatory support for families who have received a serious or life threatening diagnosis. Children and adults in these families are in great need of comfort, understanding, support and guidance when faced with the challenges of a future filled with doctor's visits, hospital stays, difficult treatments, and unknowable outcomes.

In 2016, the Center was asked by San Antonio's START Center for Cancer Treatment and Research to provide anticipatory care for START Center patients and their families. Counseling and peer support groups for children 2-18 are provided by the Center's staff at START's Medical Drive location, in collaboration with a play therapist from Austin-based Wonders & Worries. Currently services are available every Tuesday, with plans to expand as need requires.

"We are pleased to be partnering with the START Center and Wonders and Worries to fill this gap in services for San Antonio families," said Executive Director Marian Sokol. "We look forward to easing the anxiety of these children and to providing support for the adults who are coping with the challenges inherent with such a diagnosis."

Referrals are now being accepted from START Center and the community at large. If you know someone in need of this service, contact Leslie Wood, LCSW at 210-736-4847, ext. 247 or at lwood@cbcst.org.



Every Tuesday, free parent consultations and individual support for children 2 - 18 onsite at START. School age support groups starting soon.

For more information call:
Lara Strickland, MS, CCLS 512-329-5757 ext. 118
Leslie Wood, LCSW 210-736-4847 ext. 247



Mark Your Calendar!!

RICHMOND FOUNDATION MATCH October 2017

You can double the impact of your contribution to the Center by making a gift during the month of October. We have received a challenge from Laura and Jack Richmond to raise \$100,000 in October. If we are successful, the Richmond Family will match YOUR DONATION dollar-for-dollar! If you are thinking about making a gift to the Center – or know of someone else who is – please consider giving in October. We need everyone's help to meet this challenge!



2017 SISTERHOOD SOIRÉE October 12, 2017

It's back and better than ever! After taking 2016 off, the Sisterhood



Soirée is back on the calendar and anticipation is already building! Once again, Julian Gold will show the trendiest fashions and you will enjoy the great company and entertainment. Best of all, all proceeds benefit the Center! Mark your calendar now and plan to attend this girls-only garden cocktail party and style show!

2017 BREW-HA ROUNDUP Saturday, October 28, 2017



Planning for Brew-Ha Roundup 2017 is well underway. Specht's Store will again serve as the start and finish point for our 5K, 10K and Kids' Mile. Runners enjoyed the rural route near Bulverde last year, and participants are encouraged to run in costume. After the race there will be beer, food, and live music on Specht's patio – so plan to Come for the Run and Stay for the Fun!

For more events, see our website at www.cbcsst.org

A Dream Comes True!

Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas has begun providing services in the Rio Grande Valley. Children's Bereavement Center-Rio Grande Valley opened its doors in Harlingen on February 16, after two years of planning and working to make this dream a reality.

According to Executive Director Marian Sokol, "By establishing a grief support program for youth in the Valley, similar to the one in San Antonio, the Center is making progress toward achieving its vision that 'every grieving child and young adult in San Antonio and South Texas will have access to competent, compassionate care when faced with the death of a loved one.'"

The Center's expansion to the Valley included extensive assistance from a Valley-wide steering committee composed of leaders of the academic, healthcare, government, nonprofit, and business sectors. Funding for the project was made possible by Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc., Valley Baptist Legacy Foundation of Harlingen, and New York Life Foundation.

"We are very excited," said Joseph F. Perez, M.Div., BCC, and Vice President for Mission & Ministry for Valley Baptist Medical Center, who serves as Chairman of the Advisory Board for the Valley Center. "For the first time in my 24 plus years of service as a chaplain to the grieving of this community, we will now have this foundational bereavement resource for our Rio Grande Valley children."

The approximately 3,000-square-foot Valley Center, located at 2302 S. 77 Sunshine Strip will provide peer support groups and individual counseling for grieving children, teens and their families. Services at the new facility are provided at no cost and made possible through the generosity of donors, grantors, and foundations, as they are in San Antonio. The Valley Center will serve the four counties of Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy which comprise the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. According to United States Census data, some 1.3 million people live in this region; 400,000 of these are children.

Two Master's-prepared counselors execute the clinical aspects of the CBC-RGV program. Cindy Waddle, LPC, is on-site in the Harlingen offices and provides individual counseling services and peer support groups at the Center. Cindy will also help train, educate, and equip other Valley counselors with the skills and knowledge needed to provide grief counseling in their community. Joanna Gomez, LMSW, travels between Edinburg, McAllen and Brownsville, providing peer support groups and education for school counselors and other professionals who work with grieving children. The Valley Center has already formed partnerships with Edinburg ISD, McAllen ISD, and Brownsville ISD, and the mobile counselor will travel the 60 miles between these locations to provide services for children and youth.

Regional Director Corie Olivares summed up her vision for the Valley Center by saying, "I hope that we can be a positive force in the Rio Grande Valley for helping children grow into healthy adults. Our goal is to become an integral part of our community and when a need arises that we are the go-to organization to help families through their grief journey."



Children's Bereavement Center-Rio Grande Valley Staff: (l-r) Cindy Waddle, Rubi Salinas, Corie Olivares, Joanna Gomez.



Members of the board and staff of the Children's Bereavement Center-Rio Grande Valley welcomed members of the San Antonio Center's staff and board for the ribbon cutting and grand opening of the new facility in February.

Medals, Mariachis & Margaritas!

That was the order of the day on March 3 when the Center held its 2017 Fiesta Medal Unveiling party. Friends, supporters, and Fiesta royalty filled the Center during the afternoon event and were welcomed by Ben Pressentin, Regional President of BB&T Bank, the event's sponsor. Honorary event chair City Councilman Roberto Treviño thanked guests for attending and thanked the Center for its work with grieving children. King Antonio XCV Michael A. Casillas, Rey Feo LXIX Fred Reyes, and Miss Fiesta Madi Moad-Hageman also expressed gratitude for the Center's work in San Antonio and to the sponsors that support this work.

All guests received the Center's 2017 Fiesta Medal, designed by well-known folk artist Enedina Casarez Vasquez, who explained that her inspiration for the 2017 medal came from one of the children who attended last year's event. The Center's medals are available at the Fiesta Store, 2611 Broadway. Enedina reports she is already working on ideas for the 2018 medal.

See you next year!



2017 Fiesta Medal



Executive Director Marian Sokol welcomed King Antonio and his court to the Center.



Medal Reception sponsor Bill Pressentin, Regional President of BB&T Bank (left) and the Center's Board Chair Bill Day (right) thank artist Enedina Vasquez for designing the 2017 Fiesta medal.

Special thanks to our Potluck Partners!!!

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 SWBC EP



Thank You to the 2017 Hearts In Harmony Gala Chair, Brooke Leddy. She had an energetic committee that worked hard to make the event a record breaking success! Pictured above during the festivities: (l-r) Silent Auction Co-Chairs Mary Barker and Laura Crowell, Chair Brooke Leddy and Live Auction Chairs, Brittany Bader, Zoe Reilly, and Elizabeth Bartolomei. Thanks to these dedicated women, for supporting the Center's mission!



Thank You to the Women of AT&T for once again naming the Center as a beneficiary of their golf tournament held on April 7th at Republic Golf Club.



Thank You to the students at St. Luke's Episcopal School. They paid to wear their pajamas to school on Valentine's Day and donated all the proceeds to the Center.

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for three little human beings, and scared that I would mess up."

Steve found that the survivors bonded during group sessions, and through sharing their fears, angers, insecurities, and frustrations, "We learned we were not alone; that we all grieve and heal at a different pace, and that it's normal to feel angry."

"We learned that this does not make us bad people; that these feelings are normal, and we found a sense of security and peace in knowing that we were not alone on this journey to a place of healing and peace."

"Without the Center, I – and other parents and caregivers – would be lost. It could take years – if ever – to work through our grief," Steve said. He feels strongly that he "learned to be a parent" from the adults in his group.

If possible, Steve feels the Center was an even greater blessing for his children. "It is absolutely amazing how the Center's use of various activities to explore the grieving process allows children to open up at their own pace and without them even knowing it is happening!" he shared. "Each of my kids dealt with their grief in different ways. Esteban struggled the most with expressing and sharing his feelings, especially his pain at being unable to stay with his Mom the night she passed away. Sylvia has been much more emotional and will always be missing a piece of her heart without her Mom. Ralphie has always been able to express his loss and knows his Mom is no longer in pain and in a better place"

Steve and his children participated in the Center's programs for three years before they felt strong enough to move forward without the bi-monthly gatherings. He remembers, "I think it was harder for me leaving group than it was for the kids. They decided they were ready to move on. I, on the other hand, struggled. Group gatherings every other week were my lifeline, and the dinners before each session were such a blessing! However, with a little push from the kids, I too was ready."

"I like to say we are in a better place now. I know the children will never forget their Mom; her influence will forever be a part of them. But with the help of the Center they were able to process their loss, and find a place of healing and peace."

Steve ended his remarks by saying, "I want to reiterate – you may never know or understand what the Center means to us as clients, but we are forever grateful. There is no way I could have done this without the help of the Center and the other parents."

Happy End Note – As the 2017 gala was ending, guests, Dr. and Mrs. Bart Wilson of Mission Orthodontics, approached Center staff and said they were so touched by Steve's story, they wanted to offer free orthodontia for all three children. At last report, two of the children have already been fitted with braces.

Susan Pamerleau Receives 2017 Hope Award

Former Bexar County Sheriff Susan Pamerleau received the Center's second annual Hope Award during a special presentation on February 3rd. The Hope Award was established in 2016 by Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas to recognize individuals who dedicate their lives to improving outcomes for children. The intent of the award is to recognize and honor those who have made a difference in the lives of individual children, and in addition have impacted policy and served as change agents to improve the systems of care. Susan Pamerleau's lifetime of service to the nation and this community has been marked by leadership, duty, honor, and excellence in both the public and private sectors. We are proud that she is the 2017 Hope Award recipient!



Susan Pamerleau accepts 2017 Hope Award from Board President Bill Day.



Please consider a 20th Anniversary Legacy Gift.

By including the Children's Bereavement Center in your estate plans, you will be part of the driving force in assuring that thousands of children... perhaps even your grandchildren... will never have to walk the painful journey of grief alone.

For additional information,
please contact Dr. Marian Sokol,
Executive Director at (210) 736-4847.





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