



heart strings

SPRING 2020



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LEAVING A LASTING LEGACY AFTER LOSS

We all can find ourselves at a loss for words when faced with a difficult situation, especially situations like the loss of a loved one. Death is something that no one can appropriately prepare for, but at Children's Bereavement Center we provide support to grieving children and caregivers. In a situation where everything feels so out of control, we help children find solace during the most difficult of times.

Our mission is to give children an outlet for their grief - children like 14 year old Siena who found herself at Children's Bereavement Center after her father Omar, a United States Air Force Veteran, passed away unexpectedly in December of 2018.

This loss was difficult for Siena to process and she found it hard to even articulate how she was feeling. Siena's mother Nidia, through her own grief, tried to be supportive but felt that she couldn't find the right words to comfort her daughter, which led her to reach out to our counseling team.

"It makes a difference to know Siena has someone to talk to who knows the right thing to say. As a parent you don't always know the right thing to say when your child is grieving."

After spending time with our staff at the Center, Siena and her mom Nidia started to see this unexpected loss in a whole new light. It was in one of our art rooms that Siena found her voice through an activity that allowed for a creative way to express her emotions.

Through a towering pile of rainbow blocks, each color tied to a specific emotion or thought, Siena was able to make sense of her grief and put her feelings into words.

"When I would come to the Center, I would feel sad just missing my dad, but

then after talking I would feel a relief because I was able to really understand how I was feeling."

With a brighter outlook, Siena decided that she wanted to do something to pay it forward and help other children who might be experiencing similar pain. With the help of her mother, Siena decided to start a 5K in honor of Omar and his love for running. After a successful 5K, Siena decided to gift the Center with a \$1,000 donation to help more children work through their grief.

"Because everyone at the Center worked to help me, I wanted to do something to give back and help other kids feel the same love and support I felt."

Grief counseling typically involves making meaning of the loss individuals experience and figuring out a way to develop a connection to the person who has passed. Siena has created a beautiful representation of how grief - even as hard as it can be - can still be a beautiful thing.



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DEAR FRIENDS,

As I write this, the entire country remains on lock-down due to the spread of COVID-19. I feel sure we will be estimating the impact of this strange time of “social distancing” for many years, if not decades.

When Children’s Bereavement Center found it necessary to temporarily close its doors, our main concern was for the children and families receiving program services. These families are already dealing with dramatic change in their lives. It was obvious that peer support groups would have to be suspended, but our counselors knew they had to remain in touch with their clients. They understood how this crisis would intensify the

vulnerability and fear their clients were already feeling due to the death of their loved one.

For this reason, even before emergency orders were issued by the authorities, the team at the Center was executing plans that enabled our counselors to continue vital grief support services. We have purchased laptop computers for each of the Center’s counselors, and they are now conducting face-to-face counseling and peer support groups remotely. They are reporting tremendous gratitude from our clients for these “virtual visits.” In addition to altering the way they serve clients during this crisis; the Center’s counselors have also expanded their roles and are making themselves available to anyone who is experiencing anxiety and grief due to the pandemic.

And while we are unsure of how the future will look after the Coronavirus emergency, we know without doubt that Children’s Bereavement Center will continue its mission “to foster healing for grieving youth, their families, and the community.” Our ability to do that is because of our generous supporters. On behalf of the Board and staff of the Center, thank you. We are grateful for each and every one of you.

Stay safe and well until we can see you again.

Sincerely,

Scott Gruendler
CBCST Board Chair

HEARTS IN HARMONY 2020



Page Ryan, Scotty Macdaniel, Courtney Gerken, Faith Stouffer, & Emily Cage



Marian Sokol, Camille Mandigo, & Pam Thomas



Tim, Lila, & Manda Kelley



Kourtney Little, Jordan Williams & Alex McDonald



Janie Worth, Marie Smith, & Harvey Najim

ANXIETY IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

It’s difficult not to be anxious right now. Anxiety can be a natural reaction to all of the uncertainty the coronavirus pandemic has brought into our everyday lives. As we begin to adapt to a new normal, experiencing anxiety as part of the coping process can be totally expected. With anxiety, we tend to live in the future, thinking in ‘what if’ scenarios and imagining the worst possible outcomes. These feelings can be incredibly isolating, but it is important to remember that you are not alone. Below are some steps you can take to minimize or alleviate your anxiety.

Understanding your anxiety can be helpful in developing techniques to better manage it and there are several steps you can take to better understand your anxiety and keep

it at bay. Try using mindfulness and relaxation to find balance in your thoughts. Center yourself and focus on what is physically around you to help alleviate fearful and anxious thoughts. Developing a routine helps add a sense of normalcy that can also have a calming effect. Human connection is equally important and in a time where we are encouraged to be socially distant this might sound difficult. But taking time to connect with those in your household through games, movies, and exercise can be helpful. Additionally, connecting with friends and family virtually can provide the human connection that is needed. Thank goodness for technology!

Despite the challenges this pandemic has brought, it is important to take care of yourself and make your mental health a priority. And don’t forget to reach out to a mental health professional if you are struggling. Remember, this time of isolation can also be a time of self-evaluation and

progress, creating a stronger version of each of us in the end.

Sincerely,

Ashley Jesse, LPC-S
Program Director – Paloma Place

WE ARE HERE FOR YOU!

View our new video series on YouTube featuring our amazing counseling staff covering a range of mental health topics and fun family activities. Remember, we’re all in this together!



youtube.com/cbcsouthtexas

BRINGING HOPE & HEALING TO SCHOOLS

In 2019, Children’s Bereavement Center of South Texas launched a school-based grief peer support program with funding provided by the United Way of San Antonio & Bexar County and the City of San Antonio. The program is funded in

four school districts and allows us to take the peer support program traditionally held at the center out to the campus where groups are held during the school day.

It is our hope that by providing services on campus, children whose families may not have the ability to travel to us are able to receive counseling. Allowing children to express their grief gives them the opportunity to better focus on their academics and help them understand the importance of their mental health. Through our peer support programs, children

feel better connected. One student stated,

“I used to be alone with my sad thoughts, but now I have friends who understand what I have been through.”

This program is an incredibly important part of our work and it continues to grow and expand into more schools and more districts. For information on how a school can become a part of this program, please contact our School-Based Program Manager, Cecilia Gamboa at cgamboa@cbcst.org.

SAVE THE DATE!

TOUR OF THE HEART

First Friday of Every Month
11:00am - Noon
FREE to attend and
BRING A FRIEND!

PHYSIOLOGY OF TRAUMA

Presented by: Sara Mann, MS,
School Trauma Specialist
Sunday, September 20, 2020

FALL COUNSELOR & SOCIAL WORKER OPEN HOUSE

Thursday, October 8, 2020

NATIONAL CHILDREN’S GRIEF AWARENESS DAY

Thursday, November 19, 2020
Wear BLUE to show your support!

20TH ANNUAL HEARTS IN HARMONY GALA

Thursday, February 18, 2021

For more information on these and other upcoming events, please visit [CBCST.org/events](https://cbcst.org/events).



Harlandale ISD

Gillette Elementary School
Harlandale Middle School
STEM Early College High School
Adams Elementary School

29

students served

San Antonio ISD

Martin Luther King Charter School

12

students served

South San ISD

Zarzamora Middle School
Price Elementary School
Palo Alto Elementary School

26

students served

Edgewood ISD

John F. Kennedy High School
Gus Garcia Middle School

17

students served