



HEALING HEARTS IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

This time last year our entire world was turned upside down and, despite the obstacles of the pandemic, we knew that the effects of grief would not stop. We knew that our services were needed now more than ever before. We made the strategic move to pivot to virtual counseling sessions in March of 2020. This form of telehealth would allow our counselors to continue to interact with clients and safely continue our peer support groups which have proven to be an effective tool for families.

Hosting groups virtually on Zoom seemed like a foreign concept, but our counselors were up for the challenge and determined to continue to serve their clients. Children and their caregivers adapted well to the change and were excited to see their counselors in a new virtual space. Although many children missed the toys and art supplies we offer at the Center, they were glad to be able to connect with their peers and discuss their individual losses in a safe way. Our counselors also adapted to this virtual space by creating fun and interactive activities like scavenger hunts, using the whiteboard feature on Zoom to identify emotions, and playing games to help identify coping skills. Peer support groups work to normalize and validate a death loss experience and switching to virtual groups did not impact the overall purpose of groups.

One of the caregivers, Salina, attends virtual support groups with her children Marshall (6) & Madeline (4). Salina is so grateful for the support she has received from the Center after the death of her husband, stating,

“ I have seen such emotional growth in my kids. Although the virtual setting is different, my kids are able to talk to others that have experienced a similar loss and I can see how that helps them process their loss. ”



Salina is grateful for virtual support groups providing an outlet for her children, Marshall & Madeline

Another caregiver, Shellie, also opened up about how virtual support groups helped her family after the unexpected death of her husband. Her son Sean (13) and daughter Sophia (8) were participating in-person peer support groups prior to the quarantine, so Shellie worried that the transition to virtual support groups would be difficult. To her surprise, Sean and Sophia transitioned with ease and said,

“ They came out of their rooms that first night with smiles and said it felt like they were all in the same room, connecting like nothing was different! ”

Hearing from these families has helped us understand the impact of our work and the



Shellie and her children, Sean and Sophia, have enjoyed every moment of virtual support groups

role we play in the grief process. We are so proud of our counseling team for facing the challenge of virtual support head on and working through every obstacle in their way to continue to heal hearts.

SHARE YOUR STORY

We want to hear from you! Sharing your story can help us reach families struggling with their grief.



IN THIS ISSUE

Making Self-Care a Priority During a Difficult Time

We Keep Building Together!

Hearts in Harmony *at Home* Gala

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DEAR FRIENDS,

Mark Twain wrote, *“I’m in favor of progress; it’s change I don’t like.”*

I think we would all agree that our lives changed radically at this time last year due to the coronavirus. Without a doubt, in the past 12 months we have all learned, adjusted, changed, and found a way to move forward. This is also true for the Children’s Bereavement Center.

Though restrictions ordered by health officials made it impossible to provide on-site services such as peer support groups or counseling, our staff immediately began to provide these services virtually. They discovered that families were grateful to receive this continued support at such an uncertain and stressful time, even though it was not provided “in person.” The Center gradually expanded

its virtual services, adding more peer support groups, including one specifically for those impacted by a COVID loss. Recently, on-site counseling was reinstated for the youngest children, because virtual services are not as effective for this age group. In short, the Center adjusted, changed, and found ways to continue serving grieving families.

Now, with a robust vaccination program underway in our community, and the COVID positivity rate declining, we plan to resume in-person support groups in June. This will coincide with the completion of a 6,000 sq ft addition to our facility, which will increase capacity for individual/family counseling from 6,000 hours per year to 16,000 hours per year. When families can finally return to the Center, they will benefit from this newly completed addition.

The past year has shown the Center’s management, staff, and board to be resilient, flexible, and

creative problem-solvers. Most importantly – it has confirmed our commitment to provide the support services needed by grieving families - no matter the circumstances.

Stay safe and well, friends. We hope you will visit us in our new and improved Center when it opens in late May. We are so proud of it and we hope you will be too.

Thank you for your continued support of our mission. It is thanks to you that we are able to ensure no grieving child walks the painful journey of grief alone.

Sincerely,

Scott Gruendler
CBCST Board Chair

HEARTS IN HARMONY AT HOME GALA

This past year the global pandemic threw a wrench in many nonprofits’ fundraising plans. Despite all of the obstacles in our path we made very strategic moves to pivot and re-imagine a 20-year tradition! With the help of five locally-renowned restaurants and amazing sponsors such as H-E-B who provided floral decor, we were able to bring the beauty and excitement of our annual gala to the comfort of our guests’ homes thus bringing *Hearts in Harmony At Home* to life! This virtual event allowed us the opportunity to celebrate the Center’s success in 2020 amid a global pandemic while keeping the safety of our guests top of mind. Because of the support of our amazing guests we were able to raise **\$175,000** which will help us to provide grief counseling services to more than **300 children and families**.



Janie Worth



We truly missed the opportunity to celebrate our Gala in person and we hope you felt the love and gratitude we have for each of you on such a special “reimagined” night. We are already looking ahead to next year and are hopeful to get back to the Gala we all know and love!



WE KEEP BUILDING TOGETHER!

Seven years ago we received some critical feedback that challenged us to improve our services for an important part of our community - teens and young adults. Specifically, we lacked a space that felt relevant and safe for teens as the majority of our spaces were designed with younger children in mind. We responded to this feedback with a plan to expand our facility and include

spaces specifically designed to meet the needs of teens and young adults who often prefer and need individual counseling rather than the group and expressive arts processes that have been highlighted in our services for the past 24 years.

In June of 2019 we embarked on this effort with the addition of a 5,700 square foot expansion that will provide eight additional counseling spaces, allowing us to increase our impact in the community. The expansion will also provide a state-of-the-art facility allowing our staff to

leverage technology through enhanced trainings that will reach across the South Texas region and beyond.

Despite numerous obstacles related to the pandemic, the Center’s expansion is nearing completion! Our new expanded building will be open for families at the end of August. We are so grateful to the generous donors who provided the Center with the opportunity to better serve grieving teens and young adults, because no one should have to walk the painful path of grief alone.

MAKING SELF-CARE A PRIORITY DURING A DIFFICULT TIME

Self-care is a practice that might be low on your list of priorities during a global pandemic and, most recently, during a devastating winter storm in Texas. When we feel unsafe, our focus can understandably turn more towards survival, basic necessities, and the safety of our loved ones.

While it can be difficult, my wish for you is that you continue to

take time, even if just for a brief moment, to pause and reflect on the level of your well-being. Refilling our cups not only increases our sense of well-being, but also revitalizes our ability to care for others. As they say, you cannot pour from an empty cup!

Allow your self-care to be something that nurtures you, rather than something that feels like a burden. Check-in with the different parts of yourself – what might you need physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, or professionally? Identify how stress feels to you and think about what you might do to support yourself during times of stress. This can mean meditation, healthy eating, or exercise. But it can also



Andee Grether, M.S., LPC-Associate

Supervised by Ashley Jesse, LPC-S

SAVE THE DATE!

TOUR OF THE HEART

First Friday of Every Month
Starting June 4th
11am - Noon

FREE to Attend

Contact Kristina Hernandez at
khernandez@cbcst.org to RSVP

NEW FACILITY GRAND OPENING

Thursday, August 26, 2021



For more information on these and other upcoming events, please visit CBCST.org/events.



Leave a Lasting Legacy & Create a Brighter Future

It's easy. Your Legacy Can Begin Today!

When you include the Children’s Bereavement Center of South Texas in your estate plans, you are joining us in our journey of providing hope and healing to grieving children. You are ensuring that no child today or any day in the future will have to walk the painful journey of grief alone.

MONARCH
SOCIETY
A LEGACY CIRCLE OF THE CHILDREN'S BEREAVEMENT CENTER



For additional information, please contact Kristina Hernandez, Development Director at khernandez@cbcst.org