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**Children's
Bereavement
Center**
OF SOUTH TEXAS



Children's Bereavement Center
OF SOUTH TEXAS

Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas

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Children's Bereavement Center at Paloma Place

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Annual Report

2020





We heal hearts.



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Our Mission



**To foster healing
for grieving
children and youth,
their families and
the community.**

Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas is so much more than a place where grieving children come to heal.

We are a place of transformation.



"The Children's Bereavement Center gave us the time and tools to get through the tough times."



Marian's Letter

As we reflect on the year 2020, so many mixed emotions come to mind. The word "pivotal" seems to best describe it, with the global pandemic at the forefront, shifting and altering life as we knew it. It was a year that humbled us in many ways. We came to better understand the importance of family, the joy of an embrace, and the simplistic beauty of a smile.

At the Children's Bereavement Center it was a year of challenges, change, and most importantly, growth. I am so proud of the grief counseling teams across our three sites who quickly transitioned to Telehealth when face-to-face counseling and peer support groups were not feasible. With thousands of COVID-19 deaths, and so many other families left with heavy feelings of grief and loss when they could not be with a dying loved one in hospitals or even plan a memorial service, the Center's phone lines never stopped ringing. And we never stopped answering...if even from our homes.

A landmark accomplishment, despite the pandemic, was the construction of the Center's amazing 6,000 square foot Trauma and Grief Counseling Center, co-joining the main site on Olmos Drive. With a Capital Campaign aptly named "Milagros," and the blessing of generous donors we completed the fundraising by the end of the year and closed 2020 confident that the new counseling space will be needed in 2021 more than ever imagined.

Our hearts are filled with appreciation and yet we know that there is so much more to accomplish during the months ahead in our community. Thank you to our remarkable Board of Directors, our dedicated Advisory Board, our compassionate, competent staff, and generous donors. Because of you, we will continue to pursue our vision that no child in South Texas will have to walk the painful journey of grief alone.

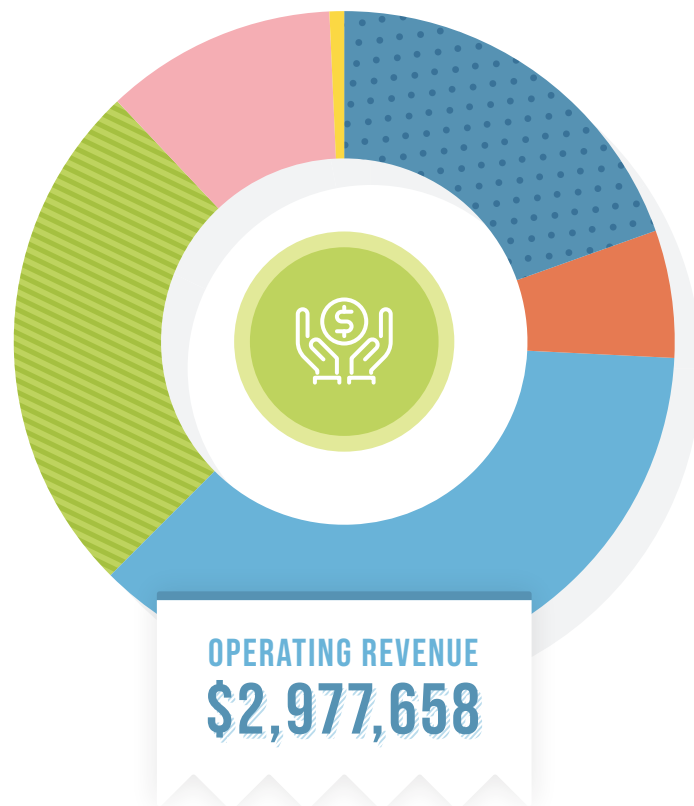


**Marian Sokol,
Ph.D., MPH**

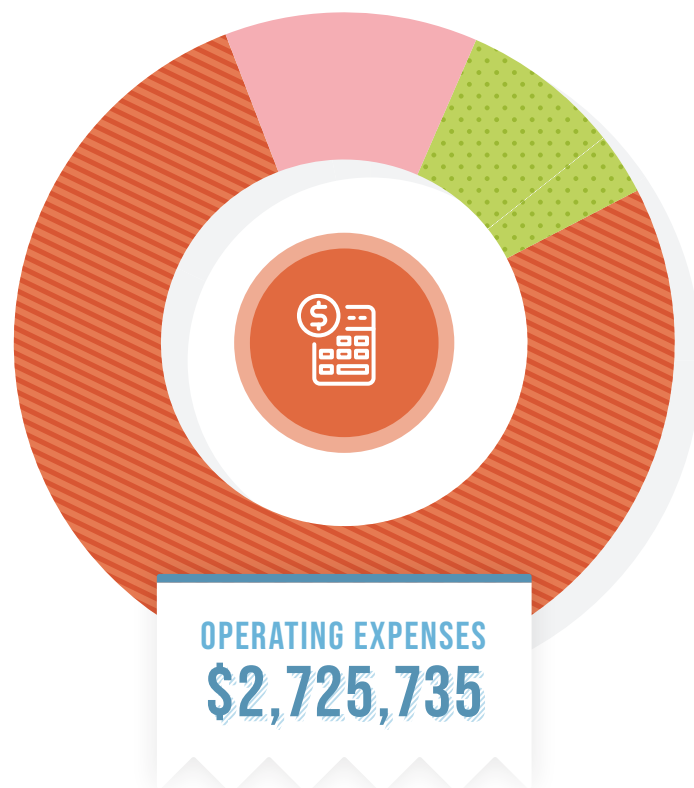
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Financials | Fiscal Year January 1-December 31, 2020



- **1%** Program Fees & Other Income
- **19%** Government Grants
- **7%** In-Kind Contributions
- **37%** Individual & Corporate Contributions
- **26%** Grants & Foundations
- **10%** Event Income



- **12%** Management & General
- **11%** Fundraising
- **77%** Program Services

“

“The Center was a place where my child could use their voice and could heal, we could all heal.”



Individual Counseling Sessions, Telehealth & Peer Support Group Visits

In a year unlike any other filled with loss and devastation, mental health was at the forefront of many conversations.

When organizations were forced to close their doors, we followed a similar protocol but remained vigilant in maintaining a connection with our clients. Our transition to Telehealth counseling provided its own challenges, but our team was determined to stay connected and support clients during some of the most difficult times of their lives. Children and families benefited in maintaining a virtual connection not only with our counselors but also to peers coping with similar death loss experiences. While this year was filled with many ups and downs, our counseling team remained a constant in the lives of the grieving families in our community.



[Read Our Story ----->](#)



2,551

**Peer Support Group
Visits in 2020**



7,215

**Individual & Family
Counseling Sessions in 2020**

The Loss of a Parent & The Support of Peers

SHELLIE, SEAN & SOPHIA | PEER SUPPORT GROUPS

“When something like this happens to you and your family, you can feel like you are the only ones in the entire world experiencing this type of loss.”

When Shellie lost her husband unexpectedly, she was unsure how to find support for herself and her two children, Sean and Sophia. Before coming to the Center, Shellie, Sean, and Sophia felt alone in their grief. The isolating feelings associated with grief made their family feel like they were the only ones experiencing their excruciating loss.

It wasn't until they started participating in Peer Support Groups at the Children's Bereavement Center that Shellie, Sean, and Sophia met other families dealing with similar losses. The families in their peer support group understood their deep level of pain.

At the Children's Bereavement Center, our Peer Support Group model brings together families experiencing similar types of death loss to normalize the feelings and emotions associated with their grief. Through this model, children are surrounded by other children who understand the complex mix of emotions related to grief and loss.

When COVID-19 forced us to close our doors, there was concern that virtual support groups would not have the same impact that in-person support groups provide. To our surprise, children like Sean and Sophia were excited to meet with their peers virtually. Our counselors worked tirelessly to keep children engaged while online. Through the online support groups, Sophia and Sean developed coping skills such as guided imagery and expressive art therapy to help them process the loss of their dad.

Sean in particular relied on guided imagery to help calm himself when he felt overwhelmed. He learned that if he took a moment to meditate and focus on memories of fishing with his dad he could process his emotions and feel connected to his dad. Sean said, "It's hard to leave that memory, but it helps me understand that grief doesn't have to always be sad. I can be happy and think about my dad too."

Peer Support Groups helped this family feel less alone during one of the most difficult times in their lives. Shellie, Sean, and Sophia allowed our counseling team to join them on their journey through grief, and we are grateful for the opportunity to support them through every step.

Camp Heroes

When broken hearts are on the mend sometimes they need a little extra support. Our grief camp, Camp Heroes, is an opportunity for children to be surrounded by peers who have similar death loss experiences.

Through therapeutic activities, children develop healthy coping skills and process the loss of their loved one. Sessions for Camp Heroes include Spring, Fall, and Summer and have proven to be so successful that we have added an additional grief camp in the summer, Camp Cardinal. Camp Cardinal is a family grief camp that provides families with a parent loss a place to work together to find hope and healing as a unified front.

[Read Our Story](#) ----->

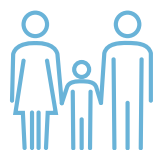


“The Children’s Bereavement Center gave us the time and tools to get through the tough times.”



67

Children Served Through Grief Camps in 2020



1,471

Family Assessments Conducted in 2020

Making Meaningful Connections Through Shared Grief

VANESSA, JOSHUA, URIJAH & MIA | CAMP HEROES

“It was nice to see them come home from camp excited. Knowing that they were meeting other children with similar losses made me feel like they were in the right place.”

When Vanessa’s husband died, staff at her children’s schools rushed to give her information about the Children’s Bereavement Center. Vanessa felt a sense of relief after learning she would have help guiding her children through this truly devastating loss.

At the Center, their family was offered the opportunity to attend our grief camp, Camp Heroes. At Camp Heroes, 7-year-old Urijah and 12-year-old Joshua spent time with other children sharing stories about their dad and learning how to cope and heal together.

At Camp Heroes, Urijah loved our sand tray therapy room and spent time crafting the perfect desert scene filled with animals and warriors. Joshua enjoyed the downtime, relaxing during snack and lunch breaks because sharing details about his loss was a very emotional process for him at times.

Despite his grief, Joshua showed true strength and not only continued to share about his dad, but he took time to lift up other campers whenever he could to help them through their healing process. Joshua discovered a passion for helping others after witnessing our facilitators’ guidance to campers during Camp Heroes. Now he says he can’t wait to volunteer at the Center when he’s older.

Soon Joshua and Urijah’s older sister, Mia, will be joining her brothers at Summer Camp Heroes at Hermann Sons Life Camp. This is a real leap out of her comfort zone, but after hearing about her brothers’ experiences at camp, her nerves are settled and she is hopeful that she will be able to work through her grief.

Vanessa is so grateful for the opportunities her children received to express their grief in ways that are meaningful to each of them. Vanessa adds, “We know that nothing will bring him back, but we are committed to doing whatever is necessary as a family to move forward from our loss.”

School-Based Support Groups

Grief can be all consuming and difficult for students who are navigating through academics, while also processing the feelings and emotions that are associated with their grief.

We are grateful for the opportunity to continue our work in San Antonio school districts, ensuring that student's have the resources necessary to succeed. As our school-based program expands, we are hopeful that we will continue to have the opportunity to bring hope and healing into the lives of students who need it most.



Healing Hearts, One Student at a Time

BRIAN JAKLICH, SOCIAL WORK COORDINATOR AT HARLANDALE ISD

“Through this partnership, I can see that the Center is totally in it for the kids and families. It’s all about them first.”

In 2019, the Children's Bereavement Center embarked on a partnership that allowed us to bring mental health resources to various school districts to ensure that students never feel like their losses limit their dreams. Through this new and exciting endeavor, we met many amazing individuals within the school districts, including Brian Jaklich, Social Work Coordinator for Harlandale Independent School District.

Brian is very invested in the success of this program, seeing firsthand the progress students make when they have an outlet for their grief. For students, grief can be a disruption of their daily life by impacting their focus and motivation for even the smallest of tasks. Brian, and other staff members, are grateful for this partnership which allows our counselors to help students see past their loss and focus on a brighter tomorrow.

With COVID-19 forcing school closures, we made the strategic move to pivot to virtual support groups, ensuring that grieving students never lost access to our program. This provided the comfort of knowing that no student felt alone in their grief.

We are happy for the opportunity to partner with schools dedicated to their students' success both in and out of the classroom.



300

School-Based Visits in 2020



322

Professionals Served through Staff Led Trainings in 2020



2,107

Unduplicated Children
& Caregivers Served in 2020



A Brighter Tomorrow

Highlights of the Expansion

At the Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas, we provide support to grieving children, adolescents, teens and young adults. Serving the age range of 3-24 has allowed us to ensure that those grieving in our community receive the compassion and care that they need during what will likely be one of the most difficult times of their lives.

Over the years, we received feedback from teens and young adults that we lacked a space that felt relevant and conducive to their healing process. With many of our spaces designed with children in mind, we began the process of designing areas that would meet the needs of our teens and young adults. These additions would allow them to feel seen and heard as they opened up about their grief.

May 2020: Let the construction begin!



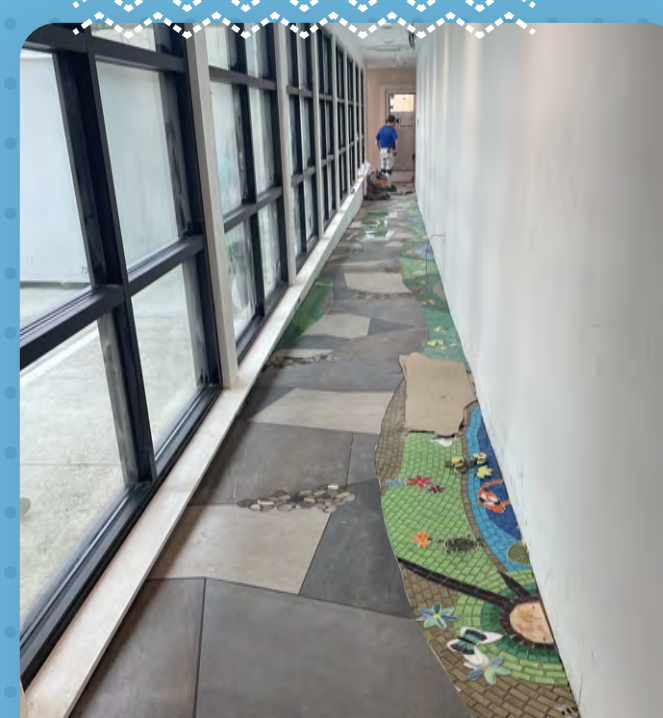
"This is a place where the sidewalk ends and before the street begins." – Shel Silverstein



Expanding our facility to include these spaces for individual counseling was no small task, but we were up for the challenge!

In May of 2020, we officially embarked on this effort with the addition of a 6,000 square foot expansion that would allow us to increase our impact within the community. The expansion also provides a state-of-the-art training facility that will allow us 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 has reached completion and is officially open for our families. We are so grateful to the generous donors who provided us with the opportunity to better serve grieving teens and young adults...because no one should have to walk the painful path of grief alone.



"There's a world out there. Open a window and it's there." – Robin Williams



"Remember you're the one who can fill the world with sunshine." – Snow White

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