

Serving the
Philadelphia Region
Fall 2008



THE CENTER CONNECTION

News and Program Updates for Friends and Supporters

A Note from the Director

Dear Friends,

A middle/high school counselor I recently spoke with summarized what many of her colleagues were also observing: That 70 to 80 percent of students coming for counseling are dealing with underlying and unaddressed issues of grief and loss. To resolve this pressing need for grief support, The Center is working to expand its outreach to more children and adolescents by serving them where they live and learn – at sites in the community and schools.

In this issue, you'll learn more about our newly relocated satellite at the Anti-Violence Partnership and outreach efforts in the Fairmount/Art Museum areas of the city. In addition, for more than a decade, The Center has partnered with The School District of Philadelphia, providing training for public school counselors and staff. The effort has increased awareness of The Center's programs and services; more than 50 percent of The Center's referrals channel from area schools.

But we know that we need to do better on behalf of the city's children. Currently, we are meeting with School District representatives to establish a new framework in which to serve more children – and serve them more effectively. It is both exciting and timely. The School District of Philadelphia is interested in addressing issues of



With their balloons decorated with their messages of love, Daja and her grandmother, Louise Jones, are poised to release them outside The Center to send their special greetings off to their loved one.

grief and loss as it relates to truancy, drop-out rate, and failure in school.

As we work together with the School District to develop our approach, we must also seek grant funding to support our plans. The investment from public and private funders will allow The Center to integrate its expertise and skills in supporting students and their success in school. It is an understatement that it will be money well spent. I look forward to keeping you advised of our plans. I also welcome you to be in touch with your ideas.

With warmest regards,
Rob Sheesley, M. Div., CT

The Center Welcomes You to Our New Home. Please Join Us for an OPEN HOUSE!

Wednesday, October 29, 2008
4:00 pm - 6:00 pm

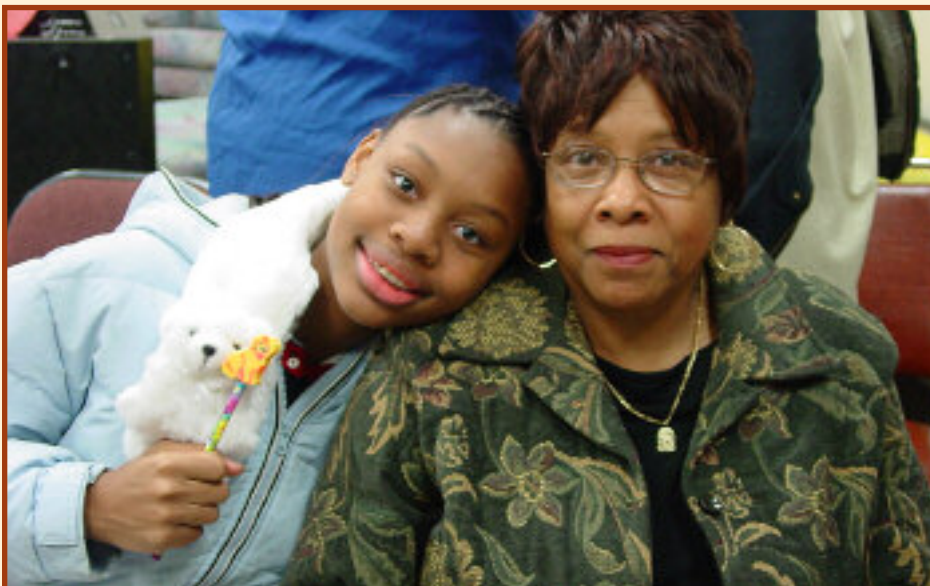
You are cordially invited to tour our new home at 1139 East Luzerne Street (at the corner of K Street). Members of our staff and Board of Directors as well as some of the children and families we serve look forward to welcoming you to this special evening. Learn about the services that The Center provides and the ways in which The Center's beautiful and unique facilities impact the grief journey for children and their families.

Refreshments will be served.
RSVP at (215) 744-4025 by Friday,
October 24, 2008.



PORTRAIT OF Commitment

Esther Speight – Board Member



Board Member Esther Speight shares a special moment with granddaughter Marsielle at The Center.

Despite having so much taken from her, Esther Speight chooses still to give. In 1995, her daughter, Lisa, who was 9-months pregnant with a baby boy, was murdered. Soon after, Esther's husband, Edward, died suddenly of a "broken heart" over the deaths of Lisa and her child. Yet, today, Esther is a volunteer Board member for The Center, providing the perspective of those The Center aims to serve.

Esther knows firsthand The Center's important work. Esther sought support for Lisa's daughter, Marsielle, who was 12 when her mother was killed. "I knew my granddaughter needed grief support and I, too, found strength from The Center," she says. Esther had attended support groups through other agencies but it was not until she came to The Center and met its director, Rob Sheesley, that she felt that she was in the right place. "I cannot really put words to why I felt the way I did but Rob and I connected. He is such a lovely man," Esther offers. Both she and Edward took their granddaughter to The Center. Marsielle attended the support group for middle school children and the Speights participated in the concurrent session for

caregivers.

The Center's adult meetings offer guidance to help caregivers manage their own needs. In doing so, the caregivers can themselves heal and more effectively support the children under their care. "My husband was always a somewhat quiet man and after Lisa's death he had so much anger. He and Lisa had been very close. They loved to cook and eat together. They would plan what he would buy at the market and then they'd prepare a feast. At The Center, he talked a lot about what he was feeling. The group had helped him open up," explains Esther.

Marsielle, too, shared her story at The Center. But unlike her grandparents, she usually expressed herself through lovely artwork not words. Says Marsielle, now 15, "Yes, we talked about what we went through, but we also drew, painted, made sand models and played with puppets. I learned that it doesn't help to bottle up your feelings and that it is best to share them with somebody. I knew I wasn't alone. The kids in my group could talk about their feelings only when they were comfortable. But we

always were involved in activities. It was fun."

And it is also important for adults.

Esther says that her group at The Center became like family. "You could talk about what you needed to say without apologizing. It may not be what you wanted to feel but you were feeling it nonetheless and others understood. Yes, I have a sad story but then there was always someone with a story that was so much sadder. I would stand up and thank God for what I did still have," says Esther.

She continues, "If it were not for The Center, I think I could have been totally crazy. But The Center made me reach in and pull out more, it was such a release. The loss that I have is mine and will never go away. My husband spoiled me in the little things. He loved to golf and would send me out shopping while he was out on the course. He always made sure my shoes were polished. Like Lisa, he had been in the Army and was used to shining shoes. Soon after his death, I was pulling on a pair of my boots and they were scuffed up. I cried all day; it made me miss him so much. My daughter was so young, only 33, but she touched so many. She was always fussing to help others. I remember a special moment when she was a little girl. She gave other children our fine, collectable dolls to play with. When I asked her why she gave away such precious dolls, she replied 'Because they don't have anything pretty.'"

"You think that there is no way possible that you can take one more step but you'll remember what someone has said in the group and it makes you do it. I can describe people at The Center only in this word: true-hearted. They have such a love for you," says Esther.

The Center Takes Several Steps to Reach More Children, Teens, and Young Adults

Satellite Relocates to the Anti-Violence Partnership Headquarters to Expand Peer Support Groups

The Center took another important step to reach out to children where they live through its newly relocated satellite site that strengthens its collaboration with Anti-Violence Partnership (AVP). At AVP, The Center now offers a peer support group specifically for children facing a loss due to homicide. AVP's facilities will also accommodate additional general peer group sessions offered by The Center. These satellite services are hosted at AVP headquarters, located at Rodin Place, 2000 Hamilton Street, Suite 304, Philadelphia.

AVP is a non-profit organization that works to break the cycle of violence by providing intervention, prevention, and support services. For more information on the new peer group program for children impacted by homicide and the additional general peer support groups that The Center will provide at AVP, please call The Center at (215) 744-4025.

The Center Launches New Outreach Efforts in Fairmount/Art Museum Area

Eileen Glass, clinical social worker and grief specialist, is volunteering her expertise to spread the word about the work of The Center. She plans to visit area schools and agencies to introduce The Center's programs and services and to provide in-service training on addressing grief and loss. If you would like to learn more about The Center by hosting such a site visit, please call The Center at (215) 744-4025.

New Peer Support Group Announced for Young Adults

Young adults are often an overlooked population regarding grief support. Their needs differ from those served through youth sessions and yet they are too young for adult groups. To bridge this gap for individuals at this transitional time, The Center is sponsoring a new grief support group for individuals ages 18-25. Please call The Center at (215) 744-4025 for more information.

The Center's Board Welcomes Steve McLain

Steve McLain, Program Coordinator with Independence Blue Cross (IBC), recently joined The Center's Board of Directors. A Certified Project Management Professional, Steve will advance The Center's strategic planning efforts. Steve's extensive experience in information system management and special project implementation will help The Center as it crystallizes its vision for growth. "I look forward to working with The Center as it creates its picture of what it aims to accomplish in the coming years," says Steve.

"I also hope to increase The Center's exposure in the corporate world and ensure that The Center continues to build relationships for fundraising," he adds. Ken Thurman, Board member and Steve's Voorhees, New Jersey neighbor, introduced Steve to The Center's mission. Concurrently, through his work with IBC, Steve visited the Pittsburgh site of The Highmark Caring Place, one of three grief support programs funded through The Highmark Caring Foundation. Offers Steve, "Both personally through my neighbor's commitment and professionally through IBC's social mission, the need for The Center kept appearing on my radar. The time was right to join The Center's Board and give back to the community."



PORTRAIT OF Healing



The Center's new home includes artwork donated by the Healing Art Project of COSACOSA *art at large* and created by members of the Society for the Arts in Healthcare. Members worked on the mural during their annual conference in Philadelphia earlier this year.



In new space at The Center, which includes areas for games and crafts, children from the Middle School peer support group enjoy a pizza party after their session.

The Center's Family of Supporters

The Center for Grieving Children, Teens and Families appreciates every donation. We want to ensure that all of The Center's donors are recognized for the important role they play in the lives of grieving children. If your name is not listed or it appears incorrectly, please forgive us and call it to our attention so that we can correct our records. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the following supporters.

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Jan and Steve Whittaker
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The Center's Family of Supporters, continued from page 5...



Daja and Katelyn pause from their dress up time to strike a pose at The Center:

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The Center for Grieving
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Donor Choice Number is
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Thank you!

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The Center's Family of Supporters, continued from page 6...

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FOCUS ON: Training



The Center welcomed new volunteer group facilitators (left to right) Joyce Mantell, staff therapist Rebecca Witmer, Michael Shiomos, Yvette Gimenez, Michelle Wile, and Wendy Glazer to its Spring Training held in April. The training helps to prepare individuals to work with children and teens in The Center's grief groups. If you are interested in serving in this vital role, please call for details and an application.

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Steve McLain
Esther Speight
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Philadelphia, PA 19124

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THE CENTER'S MISSION

The Center provides a safe and caring place where children, teens and their families grieving a death can find the support to grow through their healing process. In addition, The Center is dedicated to being an educational and supportive resource for professionals and others who interact with grieving children, teens and their families.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ROB SHEESLEY, M. DIV., CT

DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS & SPECIAL EVENTS

JUDY DANIELS

PROGRAM COORDINATOR

REBECCA THUT WITMER, LCSW

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It's magic time! Children in the elementary group, like Kevin, have time to play dress up at The Center.

The Center Connection is a periodic newsletter of The Center for Grieving Children, Teens and Families. The Center Connection is written by Ellen Saint Clair of Saint Clair Communications and designed by The Chambers Group. Articles or excerpts may be reprinted with permission and with credit to The Center.

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