

The Center for Grieving Children, Teens and Families



Serving the
Philadelphia Region
Spring 2008

THE CENTER CONNECTION

News and Program Updates for Friends and Supporters

A Note from the Director

To an artist, could anything be as exciting as a blank canvas? I feel that same sense of wonderful possibility in our new space here at The Center for Grieving Children, Teens and Families. We know that the environment in which we provide our services can increase our effectiveness in helping children work through their loss. To this end, we are taking steps to ensure that the physical space of our new home sets a healing tone. You'll learn more about our plans on page 3. As one of The Center's Board members summed up: We are doing it right, from the beginning, and are ratcheting up our expectations of what The Center can look like.

You can help. To cover a portion of the cost of new furniture, paint, lighting, rugs and other items, we have launched a fundraising effort, called Healing Home Fund. Interior designers from The Redecorators LLC have thoughtfully donated their services. An art project guided by COSACOSA *art at large* and created by children and teens from our peer groups will enliven the space. Please consider making a gift to this campaign and playing an important role in our work – and the lives of the children and teens who rely on The Center for grief support.

This newsletter also introduces three new members of our Board of Directors. I continue to be humbled by the Board's service, energized by their enthusiasm, and grateful for their shared belief in the importance of our grief work.



During the peer group session, children have "free time" to play games and enjoy other activities together. Members of the middle school peer support group pause from their break for a photo opportunity.

In this issue, I am also honored to provide more information about a new collaboration with the Anti-Violence Partnership (AVP). Together, we are expanding services for children and teens impacted by homicide.

With the coming of spring, I am looking forward to the transformation of The Center's current blank space into a warm, welcoming, and comfortable home where healing takes place. The children we serve deserve nothing less. Thank you.

*With wishes for peace and healing,
Rob Sheesley, M. Div., CT*

WEST PHILADELPHIA *Satellite Moving to New Location*

In order to better serve families from south, west, and Center City, The Center is moving its satellite to a more central location in Rodin Place, 2000 Hamilton Street. The Center will have its own meeting space within the Anti-Violence Partnership suite #304. (See story on page 2.) To register for orientation or group sessions at the satellite, call our main office at (215) 744-4025.

PORTRAIT OF A COMMUNITY PARTNER ANTI-VIOLENCE PARTNERSHIP OF PHILADELPHIA

The Center Teams with AVP to Serve the Special Needs of Children Confronting Loss Due to Homicide

Last year, one in five of all children The Center served confronted a loss due to violence. For the oldest age group, the statistics were even more sobering – nearly one in every three teenagers was enduring the death of a significant person in their life due to homicide. In another step to respond to the distinctive needs of these children and teens, The Center is collaborating with the Anti-Violence

Partnership of Philadelphia (AVP). The Center will offer a new peer support group specifically for children facing a loss due to homicide, which will be held at AVP headquarters, located at Rodin Place, 2000 Hamilton Street. The Center will also have its own dedicated space within the AVP suite to conduct the regular peer support grief groups. The AVP is a non-profit organization that works to break the cycle of violence by providing intervention, prevention, and support services. The AVP and The Center have long served as referral sources for the other. Rebecca Thut Witmer, staff therapist at The Center, had worked for seven years as an AVP grief therapist. "AVP offers individual therapy that focuses on the

restorative images of their loved one. Many of these children are also distressed by the way in which the news of the death was delivered. Some have also witnessed the homicide. Children are fearful about their safety and that of their other family members. They also have concerns relating to court hearings and trials where the facts of the case are detailed. When they hear a peer say, 'Yes, I'm worried too' their feelings are validated and that contributes to their ability to share their own story," explains Rebecca.

The Center and AVP often are the only places that the children can talk about their emotions. "We need to remember that many of the children do not have any other opportunity to talk about the homicide because they don't want to upset a family member who is also confronting the loss. At school, the children feel isolated by the experience. The Center's new peer group will allow the children to 'take from the inside and put it on the outside.' The children learn that they are not being judged and that there's nothing right or wrong about what they are feeling," continues Rebecca.

Rebecca has witnessed firsthand the healing role that children play for each other through peer support. Says Rebecca, "Recently, a boy was struggling to speak about his father's death. Another child, who was only six years old, looked at him and said, 'That would be really hard to lose your dad.' It was a very special moment and the child was then able to begin to talk about his sadness from his dad's death. We know that the peer support group with adult mentoring gives the children the support they need to grow through their grief."

For more information on the new peer group session for homicide, please call The Center at (215) 774-4025.



Myra Maxwell of AVP and Rebecca Thut Witmer of The Center discuss plans for the new groups for children and their families impacted by homicide. Myra will facilitate the adult groups while Rebecca works with the children's group.

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and teens will provide another level of support for each other."

The Center recognizes that such children face a different set of issues than those confronting grief from other types of death. The more a group has in common the greater the benefit of the session to the participants. Children will meet other children who, like themselves, are facing extraordinary circumstances and emotions.

"For these children and teens, the manner of the death is deeply traumatic. They experience intrusive images and nightmares, which get in the way of working through their grief. Through peer group support, we help children retell their story with

PORTRAIT OF HEALING

The Center is Creating A New Home That Will Complement its Healing Work



The HEALING HOME Fund

Yes, count me in! Please find my gift enclosed:

___ \$1,000 ___ \$500 ___ \$250 ___ \$100 ___ \$50 ___ \$25 ___ Other\$ ___

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Please make checks payable to: The Center for Grieving Children, Teens and Families. If your employer matches gifts, please include their matching gift form with your contribution. Mail to:

The Healing Home Fund

The Center for Grieving Children, Teens and Families • 1139 East Luzerne Street • Philadelphia, PA 19124

Now in a new home, The Center is ensuring that its physical space reflects the caliber of its services and complements its healing mission. The space, former doctors' offices, is undergoing a transformation from a clinical, sterile setting into a warm, comfortable environment, infused with art that will be created by children and teens as part of their grief journey. This metamorphosis is emerging thanks to Kim Niemela of COSACOSA *art at large* and the design team from The Redecorators, LLC.

"We are not just decorating a suite for kids to come to," says Rob Sheesley, Center Director. "Our new home will mirror our mission of creating a safe place of healing and hope where kids come to grow through their grief."

Allowing children to express themselves through creative activities is at the essence of The Center's approach. The Center's multi-purpose room will include a mural guided by COSACOSA *art at large*, which creates community art in neighborhoods throughout Philadelphia.

Still in the planning stage, the project aims to engage The Center's participants to work together toward a shared goal. COSACOSA's founder and director, Kim Niemela, explains, "I envision that the project will allow children to look at their lives and that of those who have died and include these positive aspects into the piece. Through this collaboration, the children will lift each other up and continue to heal through the art-making process. The children will take ownership of The Center's new home by displaying what they have created on its walls."

The Center's entryway will include a three-dimensional memorial tree commissioned through COSACOSA. On the tree, children will be encouraged to display artwork created to honor the memory of the individual who has died. This space will also include artwork donated by members of the Society for the Arts in HealthCare, when they attend their annual conference at Temple University this spring.

We also offer deep thanks to The Redecorators' Doreen Naughton Creede and Gina Pierantozzi who freely shared their time and expertise. Introduced to The Center's work by Board member Elisabeth Doolan, they conducted in-depth interviews of The Center's staff to gain greater understanding of the ways in which each of the rooms in the 2400 square foot facility will be used. This information shaped their design approach, ensuring that the details of each room help define and facilitate its function.

The Center, the Redecorators, and COSACOSA are creating a wonderful new home. But they cannot do it alone. The Center is seeking donations to help purchase furniture, rugs, lighting, paint, fabric and other items. Please make a gift today to the Healing Home Fund and help create an environment that contributes to The Center's work.

The Center for Grieving Children,
Teens and Families

Board of Directors

Peggy Anderson

Steven Doherty

Elisabeth Doolan

Vicki Ellis, Chair

Sam Kucia

Esther Speight

Kenneth Thurman, Vice Chair

Rob Sheesley, Executive Director

Judy Daniels, Director of Operations and Special Projects

NEW, FREE SUMMER CAMP FOR CHILDREN AT SMITH PLAYGROUND

The Center for Grieving Children, Teens and Families will be offering a new Summer Grief Camp for children from ages 5 through 10 at Smith Memorial Playground in Fairmount Park. The week-long session will run from 9:30 am-noon, July 28-August 1, and include crafts and snacks. This new initiative is an opportunity for children to get to know and play with others who are grieving the death of someone special. Please call The Center at (215) 744-4025 for information and an application.

Your gift of \$25 will help to provide snacks and crafts for a camper. Thank you!



Public Relations students from LaSalle University gather before entering The Center's new home. College projects involving The Center provide the students with practical experience while The Center benefits from the students' talent and ideas.



FOCUS ON: *Giving*

Tee-Up for The Center!

The Center will host its 7th Annual Golf Invitational at Island Green Country Club on May 12, 2008. Lunch will be served at noon with 1:00 pm shotgun start to the outing. Support the work of The Center as a sponsor or a player. Please call Judy Daniels at (215) 774-4025 for more information.

United Way Donor Choice Information

The Center for Grieving Children, Teens and Families is proud to participate in the donor choice campaign of United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania. The Center's Donor Choice Number is **14057**. Thank you!

THE CENTER'S MISSION

The Center provides a safe and caring place where children, teens and their families grieving a death or other significant losses 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
Staff Therapist: Rebecca Thut Witmer, LCSW

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FOCUS ON: *Training*

Helping Children and Teens in School with Grief and Loss

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 23, 2008
4 P.M. TO 6 P.M.**

PRESENTER: ROB SHEESLEY, M. DIV., CT

We will examine how hidden loss can undermine psychological development, performance, and success. The training will also identify appropriate interventions.

**RSVP by Friday, April 18, 2008
Registration: \$25**

Volunteer Group Facilitators

Saturday, April 12

This training helps to prepare you to work with the children and teens in The Center's grief groups in the year ahead. Please call for details and an application.

SAVE THE DATE

10th Annual Fall Conference for Professionals

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2008.

Location: St. Christopher's
Hospital for
Children

*Check our website
www.grievingchildren.org
later in the spring for more
details.*

PORTRAIT OF A COMMITMENT

*The Center Welcomes New Board Members Peggy Anderson,
Sam Kucia, and Esther Speight*

Peggy Anderson brings to the Board a very personal understanding of the experience of losing someone to violence; her father was killed during a robbery in Chicago. She values The Center for acknowledging the importance of providing a place where children and families can work through their emotions. "Grief is vastly underestimated in this society. People don't talk about it. Parents don't talk to their children about it," says Peggy. "The Center's services are important not just to the child and the family member who participate in the group sessions but the work is a great boon to society," she continues. A Chicago native, Peggy moved to Philadelphia in 1969 and served for three years as a features writer for The Philadelphia Inquirer. Offered a book contract in 1972, Peggy is the author of three works of non-fiction, including *Children's Hospital* and *Nurse*. Research for her forthcoming book on hospice care has underscored her belief that end-of-life issues are essentially a closed subject for most people. Through her Board role, she hopes to help The Center grow to touch more children and families. Says Peggy, "I am trained to ask questions. I hope to help the Board and The Center determine the ways in which The Center can reach out to more children."

Drawn to The Center's mission to allow children to express their grief, **Sam Kucia** joined The Center's Board to give back to the community. "I feel grief needs to be released so children can move through the healing process. If not, there is a scar that remains with them for a long time," says Sam. He understands from his own experience that grief may take many forms, including resentment, sadness, and disappointment. He wants to ensure that The Center continues to play a healing role in the lives of children and teens confronting death and loss. On the Board, he will apply his business ownership skills to assist in The Center's day-to-day operation and in establishing long-term plans, helping to set reasonable and practical objectives to achieve its goals. Sam also hopes to enlist the support and involvement of associates and friends to join him in serving The Center. Sam moved to Philadelphia from his hometown of Cleveland, Ohio, 19 years ago to attend the University of Pennsylvania. The father of four daughters, Sam owns and runs Environmental Consulting, Inc.

Esther Speight, whose story will be featured in the Fall 2008 newsletter, comes to The Center's Board of Directors as a grateful grandparent. Esther's daughter was murdered and Esther sought out The Center to help her granddaughter find hope and healing. "The Center was a lifeline to me and my granddaughter when we needed it. Rob provided such wonderful support. I would not hesitate to help."



Members of the middle school peer support group take center stage getting in character during the dress rehearsal of their "grief drama." This form of creative expression allows the children to look at issues relating to grief in a manner other than their own personal perspective.



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Nantambu and John work together to reassemble broken pots. On the inner side of each piece, the boys have written words describing the hard part of grief – their feelings on the “inside” such as loneliness and fear. On the outside of the pot fragments, they have included where they find their support.



Tyler and Alexander give a furry friend a lift during free time at The Center.



Middle school support group participant Nalik shares part of the story of her loss by presenting a puppet show for the other children at The Center.