



# ADEC Forum:

The quarterly publication of the Association for Death Education and Counseling®

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The Thanatology Association®

## Beyond the Walls: Grief Camps and Programming

### The Jones Family Goes To Grief Camp



By Coral Popowitz, MSW, LGSW, CT

Mrs. Jones answers the door with her baby on her hip as her nine-year-old sleepily joins her. There is a police officer at the door telling them about the accident. While picking up their fourteen-year-old from a school dance, a drunk driver hit their car killing her husband and daughter. Her daughter's twin was upstairs sleeping, fourteen-year-old boys 'don't do' school dances. Her eighteen-year-old just left home last month for his first year of college.

After the funerals, the media mayhem, after the flowers wilt and the trays of food are consumed, the Jones family begin their grief journey. Individually and collectively, trying to make sense first of what has happened to their family and then to find meaning in their losses.

Family systems models use the metaphoric mobile to show the dynamics of a family, each individual member

attached by the slightest string to each of the other members; when one member is 'cut off' the mobile, the balance is thrown wildly off. Balance needs to be restored for this family to survive their tremendous loss.

At Hearts of Hope Family Camp, the Jones family, individually and collectively, have an opportunity to restore their balance. Arriving as a family the first night, they introduce themselves to other families searching for that balance after loss. They come searching for other nine-year-olds who have questions they are afraid to ask their mother, other fourteen-year-olds who hold blame and responsibility that isn't theirs and other eighteen-year-olds who now must be 'the man of the family.' Hearts of Hope Family Camp has other mothers with babies on their hips searching for help for their children, for next steps in their lives, wondering what to do now that their family has been thrown so far off balance.

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### Connection, Imagination & Expression: The Power of Activities & Creative Arts at Grief Camp



By Bethany Gardner, MA, LMHCA

Despite the expense, liability, and planning responsibilities, grief support programs across the country supplement their ongoing programming with grief camp. In fact, The Moyer Foundation's National Bereavement Resource Guide (2014) currently documents nearly 300

grief support camps in the U.S. alone. Why has grief camp become a common addition to program offerings?

Simply put and often stated, *camp is magic*. The impact of grief support activities facilitated in the camp setting is unique and significant.

#### Camp as a Learning Environment

Camp is a historically-proven, research-driven environment for learning. In *Camp as Educator: Lessons Learned from History*, Ozier (2010)

traces the birth and development of camp as a successful learning landscape from the mid-1800's to present. In a later article, Ozier (2013) explains that camps "give kids the space to practice what they learn and opportunities to explore ways of making sense of what they know in new and different ways." As the grief camp unfolds, skills and information are quickly integrated

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## President's Message Transition is Happening!

By Jane V. Bissler, PhD, LPCCS, FT

Many have stated that 2014 is a time of transition; astronomers, astrologists, spiritual leaders and those seemingly in the know. This thought also matches what is happening for ADEC this year. As previously reported to you, a year ago this month your ADEC Board and invited guests met in Rosemont, Illinois to go through a strategic planning process. The six areas of focus for ADEC were identified as: Identity, Visibility, Governance, Business Development, Conferences, and Publications. We have now identified champions for these foci, and I'm happy to report we are making progress in each of these areas. We have planned to be working on these for the next three years, and we are just where we want to be. I want to thank your Board of Directors for their hard work. This is a massive undertaking, and they are working hard to bring new developments through for you.

As you may know, Boards of Directors are charged to position their organizations for future success. Your Board takes that responsibility seriously. We serve at the pleasure of you, our members and as such we need to plan for the fact that the members of ADEC change over time and the organization needs to change with it. Change is part of life, and being prepared to change is part of what we all have to do. The goal in the strategic plan is to be more efficient and productive in decision-making so that ADEC can be more nimble in moving forward to address changing member needs.

For the past several years, your Presidents and first Vice-Presidents

have attended conferences to help us work more effectively and strategically within ADEC's infrastructures. These two-day meetings have been very helpful and have showed us the need to look more closely at how ADEC has been operating. Your Board initially suggested one way to increase efficiency and productivity, however that proposal was not passed by the membership. We are grateful so many of you participated in the recent voting and see this as a sign of the organization's vitality. Our members showed a great deal of passion for the organization in their comments and questions about the proposed changes. We also see this as positive and are excited to see how this commitment to ADEC will be shown in other ways, like volunteering and making year-end donations. At the end of the day, we are all here to support each other and come together for the greater good. There is good evidence of this in the letter that you recently received from the Board, as well as in many past presidents endorsing the new proposed bylaws amendments. This reflects our common vision in helping ADEC face and meet the challenges ahead.

I'm sad to report the resignation of one of our Board members, Ligia Houben. Ligia has been a Board member for about 18 months. Unfortunately, she had a devastating accident in January which caused her to miss our conference in Baltimore during the month of April. Ligia was unable to travel due to her injury and needed to be close to her doctors and her home.



## ADEC's Mission

The Association for Death Education and Counseling® is an international, professional organization dedicated to promoting excellence and recognizing diversity in death education, care of the dying, grief counseling and research in thanatology. Based on quality research, theory and practice, the association provides information, support and resources to its international, multicultural, multidisciplinary membership and to the public.

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## A Note From the Editor



By Tashel C. Bordere, PhD, CT

Welcome to this insightful and resourced-filled issue on Grief Camps and Programming! This issue covers many types of programming that go beyond the walls of traditional settings—from outdoor, adventure camps to group homes to high security locations. It also explores ways to collaborate in university settings, art activities, evidenced based practices, ethics in volunteer training, resilience building, and creative ways to engage individuals and families.

We continue to see a need for programming for underrepresented populations of youth and families and hope that we will see future growth in this area. New York Life Foundation is to be commended for providing grant opportunities to increase program development and access to services for youth residing in underserved communities.

Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Tina Barrett for assisting as content consultant based on her expertise and years of experiences with grief camps and programming. Thank you also to the contributors who, although heavily out in the field programming during the summer and fall months, found time between camps to contribute to this important and informative issue.

Please also see the President's Message for important updates regarding recent voting results as well as upcoming voting dates.

If you have not already done so, please mark your calendars and spread the word about **Children's Grief Awareness Day—November 20, 2014**. Please wear *Blue* (#Blue4Kids) in recognition of children's loss experiences. Let's show our youth symbolically and in practice that their grief matters. This issue is a testament to such recognition and grief support efforts.

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## The Jones Family Goes To Grief Camp

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Arriving on Friday night, in close proximity to each other, the Jones family shuffle from the registration table to the nametags table then to the teddy bear table. Getting the right camp t-shirt size and getting settled in their cabins, the Jones family prepares for the first night of camp—Dance Night. A circle dance caller gets everyone to join in. 300-pound men are 'partnered' up with their three-year-olds to do-si-do and sashay around the circle to squeals of delight. The Jones family hesitantly enters the circle, dances have a new meaning to them now, they are not 'delighted' but they join in anyway. They are at grief camp. No one wanted to come, but each of them wanted something to take away the hurt, to take away the weight of their grief. So the Jones family came to grief camp.

On Saturday, each family member joins with others their age in Sharing Circles led by counselors. The family members, inseparable since the accident, now go it alone. Nine-year-old Leah shyly finds a new friend she remembers from last night; her new friend's nametag shows that her daddy died too. Fourteen-year-old Seth drags himself into the younger teen group, uninterested in anything since the accident. Eighteen-year-old Ben is not sure he should leave his mother and volunteers to keep an eye on his fifteen-month-old baby sister instead. When he sees the infant and toddler room and meets the licensed daycare providers he decides to check out the Emerging Adult Sharing Circle for himself. Mom, without any of her children to care for and tend to for the first time in five months, joins a circle of mothers who have lost children, of mothers who are raising grieving children alone.

Each member of the Jones family joins with others who know their grief path and who have similar questions and concerns. Each member of the family spends the weekend with their peers, with those who know their struggles in school, at work, at home, in a world that doesn't seem to know grief the way that they do. Each member participates in activities that are developmentally relevant to their age and understanding. Each member of the Jones family begins to build a stronger individual string to put their family mobile back in balance.

As the weekend comes to a close, the Jones family members are reunited in a ritual that tells them they are still a family, even though they are changing. Their weekend together has shaped their understanding of how each of them is grieving in their own developmental, individual way and has provided them with shared experiences of memory-making, playfulness and new relationships that re-connect them. The car ride home will have each Jones family member talking about their new friends who 'get it,' about how they felt in that first Sharing Circle, or what they said during the candle lighting ceremony. Now, their family mobile is coming back into balance.

### About the Author

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## Connection, Imagination & Expression: The Power of Activities & Creative Arts at Grief Camp

*Continued from Page 1*

by campers as they are continually practiced and reinforced.

The extended length of grief camp allows for activities to have multiple touch points. This reinforcement expands the meaning and application of the activity, making it more accessible for the camper's grief journey during and following camp. One example of this movement is the Camp Erin network's Memory Board.

1. Prior to camp, campers select a photo, object or drawing to display on the Memory Board.
2. Shortly after arriving at camp, campers decorate a photo frame reflecting memories of the person who died.
3. Campers participate in a Sharing Circle in their cabin group. The Cabin Big Buddy sets the scene for the Memory Board Ceremony and campers practice sharing stories of who died, how they died and memory of that person.
4. The whole camp gathers for the Memory Board Ceremony. Each cabin is invited to share their photo and stories about the person who died.
5. The Memory Board is prominently displayed all weekend so that campers can visit it and share stories.

Through the phases of this activity, campers are given many opportunities to tell their story, honor the person who died, experience normalization as they listen to other stories, and learn that they are not alone.

The variety of activities that can be facilitated during grief camp allows the common goals of a grief support plan of care to be addressed in one overall experience. For example, in just one weekend, Camp Erin provides campers opportunities to:

- Tell their stories of loss in a safe environment
- Understand, normalize and process grief in healthy ways
- Meet peers facing similar circumstances
- Learn that they are not alone
- Build a toolbox of coping skills and resources to use during and following camp
- Remember, honor and memorialize those who have died and establish continuing bonds
- Have fun!

Research demonstrates that camp experiences develop non-cognitive factors that align with the above goals, including help-seeking behaviors, self-control, persistence and social problem-solving (Ozier, 2013). Similarly, Fluegeman, Schrauben & Celghorn (2013) identify four ways that grief camp activities, in particular, impact the bereavement process: a decrease in isolation; acquisition of coping skills; an increased ability to ask for help; and the ability to express a range of emotions. Research currently underway is also exploring the ways in which bereavement camps inform positive youth development in the

areas of caring, character, competence, confidence and connection (Freeman, Richardson, Maxymiv, Willis, & Taylor, 2014). At grief camp, bereavement curriculum and the camp setting combine and create a transformative experience.

### Activities & the Camp Experience

Grief camps utilize support offerings similar to other settings. Activities include:

- arts and crafts
- creative writing
- performing arts
- music therapy
- pet therapy
- movement-based activities
- remembrance activities

Activities facilitated at camp can be bigger, messier and more expressive than in other settings. For example, in a school-based group, participants may write or draw about their life before the death on a piece of paper, then tear it to represent how it has changed. But at grief camp, campers throw or smash a plate, not only representing the change, but also expressing the big feelings related to the change.

Though not designed for grief support activities, the amenities of the host facility can also be utilized for grief education and support:

- grief hikes and scavenger hunts
- ropes courses
- trust and confidence building exercises
- peer bonding and support

And, of course, grief camp is also fun and might include:

- swimming, boating, and other waterfront options
- archery
- campfires
- talent shows

When thoughtfully planned, a grief camp activity schedule can support a wide range of ages and learning styles. It respects the developmental capacity of campers and mirrors how children typically grieve, transitioning between focused grief work and fun, energy-releasing activities.

A common and important "rule" of grief camp is that it is always okay to pass. Campers are given the freedom to do their grief work in their own way and time, practicing at their pace. And, in most cases, they do. Campers bravely risk-take by participating in activities and practicing the resources offered. This practice is transformative in the company of peers with a similar life experience, where unlikely friends create a community of support and growth as they engage in the grief camp experience together.

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## Connection, Imagination & Expression: The Power of Activities & Creative Arts at Grief Camp

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## President's Message

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We all missed her input at that meeting. Although her health is improving, she continues to need the use of all her energies for her healing as well as rebuilding her business. In light of this, she has been unable to continue her role as a member of the Board of Directors for ADEC. This was an extremely difficult decision for Ligia because as she said, "ADEC is my love;" but she did decide to resign from the Board to concentrate on her recovery and her business. Thank you, Ligia, for all your hard work as a member of the Board of Directors. We know you will be back up on your feet soon and ready to serve once again.

November brings about transitions for everyone. Those of you in the northern hemisphere may be getting out your sweaters and finding your hats and mittens. Those of you in the Southern Hemisphere may be readying your yards for summer-time planting. Wherever you are, may your transitions bring the growth and the positive aspects of change that ADEC will be experiencing as we bring our association into a new stage of life. Change can be difficult, but the benefits far outweigh the growing pains. It's an exciting time to be your President, and I'm thankful for the opportunity to serve you!

## Evaluation of Bereavement Camps: A Positive Youth Development Perspective



Rhonda A. Richardson, PhD, CFLE



Susan Maxymiv, MA, CFLE, CT



Pamela Freeman, MA

By Rhonda A. Richardson, PhD, CFLE;  
Susan Maxymiv, MA, CFLE, CT;  
& Pamela Freeman, MA

Spend a weekend at a camp for bereaved children or adolescents and it is likely you will come away from the experience convinced that the camp has made a difference for the kids. However, it requires more than a gut feeling to convince funders, sponsors, prospective volunteers, and new campers that bereavement camps are a worthwhile investment of money, time, and personnel. In an era of evidence-based programming and funding, it is essential to consider the possibilities for a more rigorous, scientific approach to evaluating bereavement camps. Our aim in this brief article is to begin to develop a blueprint for future evaluation initiatives by sharing our recent experiences.

With funding from The New York Life Foundation, in 2013 we initiated a longitudinal, multi-year, multi-site, mixed methodology evaluation of two of the largest national bereavement camps: The Moyer Foundation's Camp Erin and Comfort Zone Camp. From the outset of the project, we considered it important to align our evaluation framework with the objectives of the camps and to utilize assessment tools that are consistent with those objectives.

### Bereavement Camp Objectives

Clute and Kobayashi (2013) identified three commonly shared objectives of grief camps: provision of a safe place for campers to share feelings about their losses; facilitating campers' grief work; educating campers about healthy ways to cope with grief. This focus on growth and resilience suggested to us that a positive youth development perspective might provide a useful framework for evaluating the impact of Camp Erin and Comfort Zone Camp. Within a weekend camp experience, both Camp Erin and Comfort Zone Camp generally assist children and those who care for them as they navigate the grief process and adjust to a new reality in moving forward without their missing loved one.

### Positive Youth Development

Instead of asking whether and how bereavement camps prevent negative outcomes for grieving children (e.g., emotional shock, developmentally regressive behaviors, traumatic grief),

our research utilizes the positive youth development framework which views young people as resources to be developed rather than problems to be fixed or managed (Lerner, Dowling & Anderson, 2003). It is predicated on a developmental contextual approach which argues that when personal characteristics are aligned with growth-promoting features of social settings across time, positive development will occur (Lerner et al., 2003). According to Lerner et al. (2003), positive youth development is evidenced by 5 Cs: caring, character, competence, confidence, and connection. When applying this perspective specifically to resilience, or the ability to recover from adversity, Ginsburg (2011) suggests that control and coping also may be included. For bereaved children and youth, we conceptualize the latter as being encompassed in the grief process as defined by Worden's (1996) and Wolfelt's (1996) tasks of grieving.

The 5 Cs of positive youth development map very clearly onto the stated objectives of Camp Erin and Comfort Zone Camp that are published on their websites. Those objectives and the corresponding components of positive youth development are listed below.

According to the Moyer Foundation (2009-2014), Camp Erin provides bereaved children and youth with opportunities to:

- Tell their story in a safe environment (*confidence*)
- Process grief in healthy ways (*competence, character*)
- Meet friends facing similar circumstances (*connection, caring*)
- Learn they are not alone (*connection*)
- Build a toolbox of coping skills and resources (*competence*)
- Remember, honor and memorialize those who have died (*caring*)
- Spend time with a Big Buddy (*connection*)

Comfort Zone Camp (2012) provides bereaved children and youth:

- A strong, supportive network of peers that personally understands their loss experience (*connection, caring*)
- Age-appropriate coping skills that will help them manage their grief in their day-to-day lives (*competence*)
- Age-appropriate grief counseling by trained professionals (*character*)
- A volunteer mentor (Big Buddy) (*connection*)
- Self-esteem building and confidence building activities (*confidence*)
- Games, songs, skits and other opportunities to have fun, play, laugh and connect with their peers (*caring, connection*)

**For those bereavement camps whose objectives are aimed at promoting growth and resilience versus treating problems in campers, we recommend adopting a positive youth development perspective.**

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## Evaluation of Bereavement Camps: A Positive Youth Development Perspective

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### Evaluation Strategy

To evaluate bereavement camps from a positive youth development perspective, our research centered on two primary questions:

1. What is the impact of Camp Erin and Comfort Zone Camp on the 5Cs of positive youth development and the grief process?
2. In what ways do Camp Erin and Comfort Zone Camp provide features that promote positive youth development?

To assess impact, we selected twenty-seven self-report items from the Child Trends (2012) flourishing project that represent the 5Cs. An additional ten self-report items were developed to capture the tasks of grieving (Wolfelt, 1996; Worden, 1996), with a focus on coping and control. Campers completed the survey either online or on paper as part of the camp intake process as a means of establishing baseline measures. The survey was re-administered via an online link two weeks and three months post-camp, with additional follow-up assessments scheduled for one year and two years post-camp.

To evaluate the camp setting, researchers conducted three site visits to observe and record evidence of the following eight features of settings that promote positive youth development (Larson, Eccles, & Gootman, 2004): 1) Physical and psychological safety; 2) Clear and consistent structure and appropriate supervision; 3) Supportive relationships; 4) Opportunities to belong; 5) Positive social norms; 6) Support for efficacy and mattering; 7) Opportunities for skill-building; 8) Integration of family, school and community.

### Findings and Recommendations

Data collection and analysis are ongoing, but preliminary results indicate that attending Camp Erin or Comfort Zone Camp had a positive impact on caring, connection, confidence, and grief process (coping and control) as measured by changes in self-report scores from pre-camp to two weeks post-camp. These patterns are in coherence with our findings that both Camp Erin and Comfort Zone Camp exhibit all eight features of positive developmental settings for youth.

More broadly, our experience indicates that a positive youth development perspective provides a powerful framework for conceptualizing and evaluating the process and impact of Camp Erin and Comfort Zone Camp. As a blueprint for future evaluation initiatives we recommend that camp directors utilize their stated camp objectives as a starting point for selecting an evaluative framework. Assessments should then be aligned with the selected framework. For those bereavement camps whose objectives are aimed at promoting growth and resilience versus treating problems in campers, we recommend adopting a positive youth development perspective.

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## A University-Based Model for a Camp for Grieving Children



Illene N. Cupit, PhD

By *Illene N. Cupit, PhD;*  
*Anthony E. Klingert, BA;*  
*& Kaelee J. Heideman*

Child bereavement camps are becoming more prevalent as awareness for their need has increased. The purpose of this article is to describe a unique model for a children's grief camp that draws on the resources of a university and provides an educational function as well. We focus on camp design, extensive training of camp staff, assessment of the camp experience, and suggestions for future work on these camps.

Different camp models have emerged to provide bereaved youth with a comprehensive experience that incorporates both camp activities and therapeutic interventions, but the efficacy of these models is not well known (McClatchey & Wimmer, 2012). Some of these models include day camps, adventure camps (directed towards teenagers), weeklong residential camps, or weekend residential camps. In the case

of our camp, Camp Lloyd, our model provides mutual benefit for the students of the University of Wisconsin—Green Bay and the bereaved children in our community.

Using a service learning paradigm, the students, referred to as “Buddies,” are required to take the Death and Dying class that is offered on campus as a prerequisite, sign up for internship credit, and attend mandatory training sessions during the spring semester prior to camp. Each e-session lasts approximately three hours and targets topics including the effects of grief on youth development, personal loss, first aid, mandatory reporting training, and Buddy responsibilities. Most importantly, significant time is devoted to team building (designed by a graduate managerial leadership course) so that the Buddies learn how to rely upon each other and work together during the intense and emotion-laden week of camp.

The Buddies design traditional camp activities (e.g., outdoor games, arts and crafts), provide support for their campers, attend healing circles, attend debriefing sessions, and complete a post-camp research paper that describes their experience. Ideally, each Buddy is assigned one camper, between the age of 7 and 14, for whom they are responsible during camp. The Buddies are role models for the campers not only in terms of camp involvement but also as promoters of college education for the campers, many of whom come from at-risk populations.

Additionally, many Buddies go on to graduate school and earn degrees in the helping professions after gaining experience in this therapeutic setting. Several of these Buddies, return to camp as grief therapists, and run one of the daily “healing circles” of grief support for the children. It is important to note that our undergraduate Buddies serve as empathic listeners but as professional ethics dictate do not provide therapeutic services. Therapeutic activities during camp include the making of memory boxes, a candlelight ceremony, a balloon release, pet therapy, and daily healing circles directed by our team of counselors. Each activity is rooted in the theories of attachment, continuing bonds, meaning construction, and pet therapy (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996; Neimeyer, 2001).

Camp Lloyd uses surveys to assess outcomes for the campers, parents/guardians, and Buddies. Pretest data for the campers assesses their grief experiences, behaviors and adjustment issues that are of concern to parents/guardians. Pretest self-esteem (Thomaes, Reijntjes, Bushman, Poorthuis, & Telch, 2010) and grief symptom measures (Hogan, Greenfield, & Schmidt, 2001) are also used. On the last day of camp, campers and parents/guardians complete qualitative surveys as well as the same pretest measures. The Buddies complete qualitative surveys following the camp experience.

The camper evaluations from the last day of camp demonstrate that Camp Lloyd overwhelmingly is a positive experience. The campers benefit from both grief-related activities and traditional camp activities. Main themes derived from the campers' statements indicate that Camp Lloyd is a fun, helpful, and safe place for them where they relearn the joys of childhood along with various coping strategies. Most importantly, the campers find that there are others like them. Parents/guardians claim their campers are more relaxed, happier, and acknowledge their feelings more openly after attending Camp Lloyd.

Buddies frequently state that Camp Lloyd is a chance for them to make a difference in a child's life. The Buddies' newfound knowledge includes an appreciation of the campers' resiliency and an understanding that grief follows a unique path for each child.

As a result of our experiences with Camp Lloyd, we are confirmed believers that such experiences can be transformational for children and college students. We have not only fine-tuned the operation of camp, but have developed an effective training program that is labor-intensive but necessary, ethical and effective. Continued work in assessment is a focus of the camp staff, as the development of appropriate outcome measures and obtaining posttest data is challenging yet imperative.

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**As a result of our experiences with Camp Lloyd, we are confirmed believers that such experiences can be transformational for children and college students.**

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## A University-Based Model for a Camp for Grieving Children

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## A Note From the Editor

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As we move through the holidays, let us be mindful of our personal and familial losses and memories, expectations around holidays—making adjustments as needed (e.g., dividing tasks associated with holidays so less overwhelming), and the ways in which holidays often evoke feelings, thoughts, and behaviors related to our loss experiences. Let us be attentive to our needs for self-care and those of individuals in communities in which we live or work. Memorializing cared-about persons through holiday ornaments in their honor, donations to agencies and organizations in their names, and storytelling at family gatherings can be healing reminders of their continued value and presence in our lives.

Finally, there is still time to submit a brief article related to technology and death, dying and loss for next issue of *The Forum*—**Thanatechnology**. Please contact Tashel Bordere to discuss your ideas and expertise on the topic for possible submission.

### Resources

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### About the Author

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## Volunteer Training and Screening for Grief Camps



*By Pamela Gabbay, MA, FT*

Grief camps allow kids and teens a chance to explore their grief in a unique, outdoor setting. At camp, they have the opportunity to be with other children who have also had someone die.

Grief camps consist of activities that you would find at any camp—swimming, canoeing, fishing and nature walks. What makes grief camps special is that you will also find grief related activities and memory ceremonies. For many grief camps, volunteers are a necessary, vital part of camp and the camp wouldn't be able to function without them.

Typically, volunteers are utilized to help with the set-up of camp, the running of it, and the actual break-down and closing of camp. Many grief camps use volunteers to help conduct their grief-related arts and crafts, as well as to oversee their outdoor sports. One of the most important volunteer positions at camp is that of the camp counselor—otherwise known as a Big Buddy in some camps. The Big Buddy's role is to companion the camper throughout their time at camp.

For the past eight years, the Mourning Star Center has operated Camp Erin Palm Springs, a grief camp for kids aged 6–17. A typical camp weekend consists of 100 campers and 110 volunteers, plus staff. For those who are new to grief camps, this ratio of camper-to-volunteer might seem generous. Through the years, we have found that having plenty of extra hands has worked to our advantage. Some camps prefer to have less volunteers, it just depends on the needs of the particular camp.

Volunteer recruitment occurs in many different ways. Volunteers are recruited from presentations in the community, from local colleges and through professional networks. Volunteers are also recruited through newspaper and radio publicity that occurs prior to camp. Proper volunteer screening is crucial to ensure the safety and well-being of campers. The process of volunteer screening can vary from camp to camp.

Some camps might choose to have interested parties complete a full application packet prior to attending a volunteer training, while others will have individuals turn in the application packet after the training. At our camp, we have potential volunteers complete a volunteer application prior to attending the training. After we have received their application, a follow-up phone call occurs between a staff member and the prospective volunteer. Some of the questions that are asked during this call relate to the answers given in the volunteer application.

In this application, potential volunteers are asked to explain why they want to volunteer at camp and whether they have

ever volunteered at a camp in the past. Applications also contain a section about their own experience with grief. This is important information to have when screening new volunteers.

In addition to the application, prospective volunteers must get fingerprinted for a background check. In California, many camps utilize Live Scan for this service because Live Scan will check both the Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation records. Without Live Scan fingerprinting completed, individuals cannot attend camp; no exceptions are permitted. In addition to the background check, other paperwork and tasks that must be completed prior to camp includes a physical, a TB test, a confidentiality agreement and a media release.

Training volunteers is a critical component in helping them be prepared for camp. Volunteers need to know what to expect and also specific details about their roles at camp. To that end, all of our volunteers go through a full day of training before going to camp. This training is mandatory for all new volunteers and, without it, they are not able to participate in camp.

Training consists of learning about children and teen grief, as well as learning about camp. While some of our volunteers are very familiar with the functions of a children's camp, many have not had any training in childhood bereavement. This is a key part of our training. During our training, they also learn about ways to interact with kids at camp and how to help kids in a supportive manner. Additionally, we cover topics like separation anxiety at camp and what to do if

a child starts missing home.

Many of our campers have not attended any grief support groups yet and this is their first time exploring their grief in a group setting. It is important that all volunteers have an understanding of children's grief and feel comfortable working with bereaved kids and teens. Other areas that are covered in great detail in our volunteer training include: the importance of confidentiality, setting healthy boundaries, standards of conduct for volunteers, camp safety, and ground rules for sharing.

After volunteers have completed all of their paperwork and training, camp staff must evaluate each potential volunteer to see where they would be a good fit at camp. Not everyone who is trained turns out to be a good fit and, in that case, they would not be invited to volunteer at camp. Taking the time to carefully screen, train, and place each volunteer helps ensure the best camp experience for all involved.

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**After volunteers have completed all of their paperwork and training, camp staff must evaluate each potential volunteer to see where they would be a good fit at camp.**

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### About the Author

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## Journey into the Wilderness of Grief: Military Survivors Find Healing at TAPS Retreats



By Ellen Andrews

In 2014, the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) celebrated 20 years of providing hope and healing to all those grieving the death of a loved one serving in the Armed Forces. Since its inception, TAPS has led the way in providing compassionate peer-based care, connection to grief resources, and establishment of a global family of military bereaved.

Helping a family that is scattered across the country, and sometimes overseas, is a challenge. To bring survivors together for short periods that can be intensively transformative, TAPS conducts Military Survivor Seminars and Retreats that give participants the opportunity to find connection, and restorative strength from one another. In 2014, TAPS hosted 49 survivor gatherings, including 11 adventure and transformation retreats.

At outdoor adventure retreats, TAPS Group Leaders (military survivors themselves) challenge physical limits, often mirroring the struggles of grief and loss. Activities have included widows taking a leap of faith from 13,500 feet and sky diving with the Army's Golden Knights Parachute team, and a Siblings Retreat where brothers and sisters not only cheered on the mushers in the Iditarod, they felt the peace and power themselves while driving a team of huskies through the snow.

From Alaska to Florida, adventure events provide challenging activities and opportunities for discussion, sharing, and goal setting for the days ahead. Through kayaking, hiking, skiing, and more, survivors open themselves to risk, and step outside their comfort zone in the company of others who are facing the same struggles in life. They reach a new level of self-awareness, confidence, and hopefulness. They find strength in themselves individually, and strength as a group. In overcoming challenges, the small, intimate group transforms from strangers to a community. They build confidence and trust among each other fostering open dialogue, resilience of the spirit, and healing for the soul.

On the first day of a recent retreat, participants were asked to write down their 'intentions' for the days ahead. These proved incredibly profound, and included the following:

*"To establish peace inside my own soul."*

*"To start living and stop existing."*

*"To do the things that can still be done."*

*"To reflect on the anniversary of my husband's death the life that we shared and who I am now. To find a place of peace with the two."*

Death ends a physical life, but it does not end a relationship. For these young survivors, losing their courageous military loved one means that their life is now on a different course, and they must begin to find a 'new normal' in which to survive and thrive.

The struggles and daunting tasks of an adventure can be a reflection of the grief journey and the power of TAPS peer support. The activity of rock climbing presents an obstacle to be overcome. The initial feeling may be one of dread and fear, emotions common in the grief process. We are unsure of our future, whether we can take the next step, what direction to go. We inch our way up, moving methodically and cautiously.

**Through the camaraderie of fellow travelers we discover that we can face the challenge, renew the spirit, and find a positive path toward the future.**

With us is another on the journey, providing encouragement and that gentle push to spur us onward. We push past the fear, reaching the top or perhaps just making it to that next hold on the wall. The resulting sense of accomplishment provides a source of strength and hope for meeting the steps along our grief journey.

Snow-capped mountains, calming streams, and towering trees—surrounded by nature, the bereaved can look beyond themselves,

beyond their daily routines, and even beyond their grief. Participating in adventures, simple projects, or private discussions transforms old paradigms, opens hearts to new ideas, and refocuses energy.

TAPS also hosts 'Transformation Retreats,' offering a more holistic approach to rejuvenation of mind, body, and spirit. While physical activity may be incorporated into these events, survivors who are further along in their journey focus on self-awareness and on the future. They ask, "Who am I now? What do I want? How do I get there?" These programs are more thoughtful, and feature art therapy, yoga, journaling, meditation, and goal setting. Retreat events are limited in attendance, providing the intimate setting necessary to maximize benefits.

A recent transformation retreat attendee offered how the experience provided insight and self-discovery:

*I discovered that I need to be more open to learning new ways of healing. At first I thought the art therapy was a little corny, but I ended up learning a lot about myself and others. This activity had the most surprising outcome for me; I really enjoyed it and will also be using this activity with my own family!*

In daily life, we may not be able to talk about our loved one or the emotions we experience. We may feel detached and isolated from those around us. Through sharing time and challenges with others, we gain a level of trust with the group,

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## Invisible Strings: Experience Camps for Boys



By Jenny Schreiber, LICSW, FT

Invisible strings—they tug at our hearts and connect our souls. (Figure 1) That was this year's theme at Experience Camps, one-week camps for boys, ages 9–18, who have experienced a significant death-loss.

Every boy who attends an Experience Camp is on a journey that began the day someone close in his life died. Experience Camps began in 2009 with 27 bereaved boys at Camp Manitou in Maine. The weeklong overnight camp transformed the lives of its campers and volunteer staff. Fast-forward to 2014, when we had 116 campers and 90 volunteers in Maine come together for what has become the most meaningful week of their year. Each year, we hear the same complaint on the last day of camp, “Do we really need to wait 51 more weeks?”

Experience Camps provide campers with an opportunity to enjoy the many benefits of camp life in a safe environment, free of the isolation that comes with experiencing death as a child. The overall goal is to provide a safe environment where kids can explore their grief and break the isolation they may feel with their non-camp peers.

Campers are all unique in their circumstances, emotions, expressiveness, and personality. Experience Camps strive to unite the campers with their common bond of loss, while embracing and accepting their differences. Because the camp is free to the campers, it represents an opportunity they may not have otherwise had.

The interplay of *play* and *grief* is a critical component to the success of camp. A typical day at an Experience Camp includes two instructional activities and one bereavement activity in the morning, followed by all-camp activities in the afternoon and evening. The camper chooses his two instructional activities, so campers are mixed by age and interest.

During the bereavement activity, campers stay with their bunks and participate in a grief-related project that is facilitated by a clinician. The boys participate in a “Sharing Circle” on the first full day of camp to give them an opportunity to share their stories and begin to connect in a more meaningful way with their bunkmates. They reconvene the circle on the last full day of camp to share anything they were not comfortable discussing the first time and what they will take with them from their camp experience.

The remaining bereavement periods include a more “hands on” activity that provides sharing opportunities through the use of expressive arts. Experience Camps are mindful that boys are not apt to expose themselves willingly to feelings of vulnerability.

Our programming is created with that in mind and includes daily clinical activities designed to build the foundation of trust, intimacy, and acceptance that offer language and supports for campers to expose their feelings in ways they may not risk in any other venue. We “sprinkle in” opportunities to share stories of loss and growth related to bereavement whenever it organically “fits.” As campers return year after year, their stories and experiences of their loss journeys change. Bearing witness to their growth and exquisite witnessing of one another is humbling and a privilege.

One of the unique opportunities at Experience Camps is the Counselor in Training (CIT) program, which prepares campers to be counselors through increased responsibilities and leadership training over the course of two summers. It also fosters leadership development and goal setting opportunities that last beyond camp. The first-year CITs, ages 16–17, may be returning or new campers. The second CIT year is by invitation, based on the previous year's performance and the camper's ability to model the values and expectations of our program. The compassion and support that the CITs provide to one another and to the younger campers is indescribable. Irrefutably, they raise the bar for every camper and counselor on what it means to be a leader by engaging younger campers, inspiring confidence and maturely balancing high-energy fun with empathetic care.

This year's CITs spent the week sharing about their losses and reflecting on the traits and responsibilities of being a leader at camp and in their every-day lives. Each camper chose a word that summarized the depth of his experience at camp. As a lasting legacy of their CIT year, their sentiments were depicted in a painting of a tree with their words representative of the branches. (Figure 2)

At the closing campfire, each CIT shared his word and what it means to him, and then explained how that translates into his actions and behaviors at camp and beyond. Words included *confidence*, *revitalizing*, *unity*, *connections*, and *remembrance*. Amidst a roaring campfire and the flickering of more



Figure 1: Invisible strings—they tug at our hearts and connect our souls.



Figure 2: As a lasting legacy of their CIT year, their sentiments were depicted in a painting of a tree with their words representative of the branches.

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## Journey into the Wilderness of Grief: Military Survivors Find Healing at TAPS Retreats

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knowing we are in a safe environment to fully express our journey. In this intimate setting, we find words; we find our voice. As one sibling shared:

*Attending the TAPS retreat was a pivotal milestone in my grief journey. For once, people were actually on the exact same journey I was on. For the first time in almost a year and a half, I was able to talk about my brother without him being a taboo topic.*

Through the camaraderie of fellow travelers we discover that we can face the challenge, renew the spirit, and find a positive path toward the future. We do this while also finding ways to incorporate our loved one in our 'new normal' and honor the gift of their life.

The take away is simple—a sense of community and understanding provide strength for the journey.

There is life to be lived and lived fully. Those grieving can endure and rise above the pain. They can realize dreams and honor those they love. They can survive, and thrive—together.

To find out more about TAPS retreats and other support programs, visit [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org); email [info@taps.org](mailto:info@taps.org) or phone toll free 1-800-959-TAPS (8277).

### About the Author

**Ellen Andrews**, is the surviving fiancé of a Navy Lieutenant killed in a 1995 aviation accident, Ellen serves as TAPS liaison with military Casualty Officers and manages TAPS national online community for military survivors who find comfort in connecting with peers through various forums. Ellen is a member of the *TAPS Magazine* Editorial Board and contributor to numerous publications on the subject of grief in the military. Email: [ellen@taps.org](mailto:ellen@taps.org).

## Invisible Strings: Experience Camps for Boys

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than 100 memorial candles, one CIT remarked, “*We are all brothers now. We are one. I am not alone, and neither are you.*” As tears rolled down his face, he was wordlessly embraced by more than a dozen of his camp brothers.

Those are the invisible strings. They tug at our hearts and connect our souls.

### About the Author

**Jennifer “Jenny” Kaplan Schreiber, LICSW, FT**, is the author of *You Are Not Alone: Young Adults Coping with Death (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)* (2014) and a doctoral candidate at Simmons College School of Social Work in Boston, MA. Jenny is Clinical Director of Experience Camps and Executive Director for Jeff’s Place Children’s Bereavement Center, Incorporated. For more information, visit [www.manitouexperience.org](http://www.manitouexperience.org) and [www.jeffsplacemetrowest.org](http://www.jeffsplacemetrowest.org). Email: [jenny@manitouexperience.org](mailto:jenny@manitouexperience.org).

A reminder that November 20, 2014 is Children’s Grief Awareness Day



## Building Resilience with Grief Camps



By Pete Shrock

“Camp” is a word that most equate with simple summertime fun. But if you ask those who have attended grief camps, you’ll soon find out that the camp experience also involved something much deeper and more meaningful.

Participants describe bereavement camps as places of acceptance, unconditional support, bonding, and personal growth. Camps are a great place for bereaved children struggling with many different challenges to discover new coping skills and strategies in a fun atmosphere.

Bereaved children face tremendous stress. In addition to academic performance pressure, strict schedule commitments, high achievement standards in school and athletics, confusing media messaging, peer pressure, and family tension, grieving children also often feel profoundly isolated. Most parents and schools lack adequate tools to help children cope; meanwhile friends cannot relate to the loss, family members are consumed with their own grief, and society rewards children for showing little emotional reaction. Without healthier solutions, grieving children often decline from thriving to simply surviving. They easily become hostile, scared, and aggressive, and may indulge in unhealthy and unrealistic behaviors—or worse, give up.

Positive Youth Development, an intervention developed by Comfort Zone, changes this outcome of grief for children as young as 18 months and as old as 26 years of age. It draws on the strengths of each child to develop healthy solutions and coping skills, building the child’s resilience. Resilience becomes its own positive feedback mechanism: it assists children in making wise decisions, in recognizing and building on natural strengths, in dealing effectively with stress, in fostering hope and optimism, in developing skills to navigate a complex world, in avoiding unhealthy risky behavior, and in taking care of their emotions and their bodies.

Positive Youth Development is embedded in the schedule of a camp program. Our model is customized to meet the age-appropriate needs of children ages 5–26, through a one-day camp program (ages 5–17), a three-day weekend camp (ages 7–18), and several Young Adult Programs (ages 18–26). Each program is carefully designed to serve as an individual invitation to each child. Through our “challenge by choice” focus, Comfort Zone creates opportunities for children to determine their level of participation and commit to their own success. Each child is encouraged to take charge of his or her own resilience in a fun, safe camp environment naturally conducive to personal growth.

To reach each participating child in this way, Comfort Zone implements a variety of unique, customizable techniques. These include the positive youth development model, one-to-one mentorship, professionally facilitated psycho-educational grief groups, cognitive behavior therapy, trauma-focused cognitive behavior therapy, trauma narrative, art therapy, and play. We seek to thoroughly understand each child’s unique strengths, family dynamics, social and economic environment, and cultural and religious beliefs.

Comfort Zone staff complete a needs assessment for each participant before camp and use this evaluation to match each child with an individual mentor who is best equipped to meet the child’s strengths and personal interests. These mentors provide campers with an individual who will listen and serve as a friend, champion, and anchor.

During the camp, each child also participates in an age-based psychosocial grief group that meets up to four times throughout the course of the camp. Professional therapists who specialize in grief customize and lead a clinical grief curriculum for the group. These groups also allow campers to meet others who are healing from the same kind of loss. Each program and activity is adapted to focus on the strengths of each community and each child.

To continue this work supporting bereaved children, Comfort Zone seeks collaboration with other local and national organizations. Partnerships are essential to further efforts to provide individualized, high quality services to families that have been impacted by the death of a parent, sibling or guardian. Since no community is the same, partnerships facilitate understandings of community nuances and allow program to be tailored to meet unique needs.

As best practices in bereavement continue to be developed and refined in our country, we have learned that one of the best ways to support bereaved children is through the use of an individualized approach.

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### About the Author

**Pete Shrock**, is the vice president of strategy and design at Comfort Zone. He serves on the Senior Management team assisting with the vision and direction of the organization. Pete is the leader in developing new business and strategic partnerships for Comfort Zone. He collaborates with external partners and organizations to develop services for specific communities in need. Pete also serves as the spokesperson for Comfort Zone’s mission and vision. Pete currently serves on the Board of Directors for the National Alliance for Grieving Children. Email: [pshrock@comfortzonecamp.org](mailto:pshrock@comfortzonecamp.org).

# Compassionate Leadership: Ethical Considerations of Transitioning Grief Camp Participants to Mentoring Roles



Tina Barrett, EdD, LCPC

By Tina Barrett, EdD, LCPC  
and Julie Ballew, MA

Grief camps and other grief support programs face the challenge of providing developmentally relevant programming for individuals throughout the grief journey. Years after a loss, many individuals benefit from continued personal support coupled with the opportunity to companion, support and mentor peers. As a result, many grief camps integrate past campers into leadership roles. This article explores several ethical considerations in transitioning participants to mentors within a teen leadership program at a youth bereavement camp with a goal to maintain program integrity and ensure mutual benefits for all involved.



Julie Ballew, MA

The Peers-As-Leaders (PALs) program

was designed specifically for high-school students interested in mentoring at youth bereavement camps. PAL applicants have experienced the death of a family member and have personally participated in grief support programs (i.e., camps, groups, and/or counseling). It is critical to strive to create a program that is beneficial to not only the teen leaders but also the youth campers. Eligible teens complete an application outlining their interests and motivation for participating in the leadership program at a youth bereavement camp. They also obtain a letter of support from a personal or professional reference. The PALs program has three goals: 1) Skill Development; 2) Experiential Leadership Roles; and 3) Continued Support.

## Skill Development

The idea that an individual has had a personal loss experience does not ensure that s/he is prepared to effectively support others nor serve in a leadership role. Successful mentorship requires training and practice. PALs participate in workshops throughout grief camp focusing on self-identity, grief and trauma education, and the development of leadership skills. Highly experiential trainings blend discussion, role plays, and challenge games.

Specific topics include:

- Leadership styles and teamwork
- Communication skills
- Supporting grieving kids
- Grief myths
- Goals of misbehavior: Preventing and redirecting negative behavior

- Navigating conflict constructively
- Cultural influences on grief responses
- Mistakes as learning opportunities

Information and skill development is empowering and enables us to interact in the world more deliberately. What differentiates leaders from non-leaders is the ability to identify and own our weaknesses and mistakes, and consciously address them. Processing successes and challenges (or “hits” and “misses”) and creating intentional action plans are integral parts of the program.

## Experiential Leadership Roles

Leadership opportunities for PALs at grief camp allow them to create shared ownership and investment in programming as well as to develop and refine their skills. PALs bring tremendous wisdom and understanding from personal experience with them as they supervise and strengthen young campers, enhancing the camp experience for all involved. In recognition of different personality styles and personal strengths, leadership

opportunities are selected that engage both interpersonal and organizational skills.

Leadership roles include:

- Companion a younger camper or serve as a “Buddy”
- Lead an activity (arts & crafts or active game)
- Read bedtime stories in youth cabins
- Assist in the dining hall
- Supervise youth cabins before breakfast during Staff Council
- Set-up camp rituals

Some teens are drawn to interpersonal roles, while others bring their organizational skills to the team. Some are problem-solvers, some generate terrific positive energy, and others have a knack for catching small details and keeping things moving smoothly behind the scenes. Ultimately, the goal is to learn that we are stronger together, and the more effectively we not only weave together, but illuminate one another’s personalities, talents, and strengths, the greater our potential for success in the provision of support services.

## Continued Support for Teen Mentors

A critical goal of the PALs program is to offer continued personal support for teens as they transition to leadership roles. It is important to hold that talented, compassionate adolescents are still, and forever will be, integrating their own profound losses into their lives. As they mentor others, they need and deserve their own support. PALs are housed separate from the youth cabins under the care and supervision of highly specialized leaders.

**To maintain program quality, the progression from a participant to a leader involves deliberate training and continued support amidst the mentoring opportunities.**

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## Compassionate Leadership

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Supportive opportunities for the PALs to process and re-center themselves is central to the mentorship program including time and space to debrief as well as to honor personal losses and experiences. The PALs program is dedicated to fostering group cohesion through shared fun such as kayaking adventures, team challenges, midnight snacks and games, and other 'teen only' time in addition to leadership training and practice.

### Additional Considerations

Although some individuals find great strength and value in transitioning to leaders, others do not. It is important to provide alternative support opportunities for teens who may not wish to be PALs or who would not be appropriate leaders.

Additionally, while some mentors find strength or meaning in sharing their stories to help or educate others, it is important to note that some do not and may feel pressure if asked to speak by someone in an organization they know and trust. They may feel obliged to return a favor—especially if services were provided free of charge—and may feel uncomfortable saying 'no.' When asking a camp participant or leader to speak about their experience, we can decrease risk of exploitation by providing options to volunteer rather than asking individuals, and by allowing participants to change their mind.

Grief is unpredictable. What seems appealing at one moment may seem intimidating or overwhelming at another. Consider ways to increase emotional safety as participants branch into leadership and speaking roles through proximity (standing nearby), role-play, or partnering with another. Be prepared to run mentor-in-training led activities or presentations with a 'Plan B' to allow the mentor to step away, if needed.

### Conclusion

Following their participation in bereavement camps, many youth and adult campers aspire to become mentors. To maintain program quality, the progression from a participant to a leader involves deliberate training and continued support amidst the mentoring opportunities. Leadership programs can enhance the overall camp experience for both mentors and campers. Mentors often comment, "It felt good to offer support at the same time that I was supported," and "I feel like I am having a positive impact in the lives and grief journeys of others." The loss may never feel acceptable, but the ability to reinvest in life and help others can provide hope and meaning. Indeed, we are stronger together.

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### About the Authors

**Tina Barrett, EdD, LCPC**, is the co-founder and executive director of Tamarack Grief Resource Center. Strengthening and stabilizing individuals and families following profound loss through groups, consultations, grief camps, retreats, and community workshops, Tina has spent the past 20 years specializing in outdoor-based grief support programming and directs grief camps for youth, teens, adults, women, and families. Her doctoral research focused on participant perceptions of bereavement camp benefits. She has trained and supervised grief camp facilitators since 1997 with special attention to honoring individual responses to loss and strengthening the family system. Email: [tamarackgrc@live.com](mailto:tamarackgrc@live.com).

**Julie Ballew, MA**, is the clinical manager for Tamarack Grief Resource Center based out of Missoula, MT. Julie provides individual and group support for children, adults, couples and families following devastating loss. Julie ardently believes in our capacity as humans to heal and as such, partners with her clients to explore their restorative potential. She embraces nature-based, creative, reality and cognitive-based therapies. Over the past three years, Julie has been a part of bereavement camp care teams at day camps and overnight camps for youth, adults, and families. Email: [julietgrc@live.com](mailto:julietgrc@live.com).

## Behind Bars: Providing Grief Support and Education in Non-traditional Settings



By Caitlin Burns, LCSW

Every day in this country more than 60,000 youth are housed in residential juvenile justice placements (Sickmund, Sladkey, Kang, & Puzanchera, 2013). Additional youth are admitted, rarely by choice, to drug-rehab programs, alternative schools and mental health facilities. Young people often enter these programs already on the fringes of society. They may have fallen behind academically. They may carry a family history of abuse, neglect, mental illness or drug abuse. They know about loss. Education, support specific to grief, and more basically, someone to listen are the things they really need.

The Caring Tree of Big Bend Hospice has always been a community-based program. We bring grief support into schools and have seen the benefit of meeting kids where they are. It became clear over 10 years ago that some of the youth most in need were not at school. We began focusing our summers on outreach to programs that either house or educate youth year round. In the past eight years, we have coordinated and facilitated 37 groups with 10 different partner agencies and served over 400 young people. Looking into the eyes and hearing the stories of intelligent, creative young people that some people in society have already written off as “bad kids” is important work. A number of factors contribute to the uniqueness of running groups with these programs. While the issues that follow are not exhaustive, the hope is they will provide insight to anyone considering this work.

### Trauma Histories

Perhaps the greatest lesson learned from these groups is the need to have a solid grounding in trauma informed care. A 2013 report from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency found that 92.5% of its sample had experienced at least one type of trauma (OJJDP, 2013). In a separate study, researchers found that loss and bereavement was the most frequently reported type of trauma for incarcerated youth (Dierkhising, Woods-Jaeger, Briggs, Lee, & Pynoos, 2013). While not all grief is traumatic, all trauma involves grief and its impact cannot be ignored (Steele, 2001). Past traumas can influence a youth’s ability to trust, their need for clear boundaries and personal space, or their affect or participation level in group (Steele, 2009).

### Physical Environment

Practically speaking, what is the space for group? There may not be an ideal group room. You may have a classroom with desks, a cafeteria with long tables and chairs, or a tiny room with some seating but no writing surfaces. Group members may

associate the space you’ve been assigned for group with another purpose and have a hard time adjusting to the change.

### Agency Rules and Restrictions

Here are some questions to consider or ask the facility staff:

- Are you allowed to bring outside food for the group?
- Are there set times the agency is permitted to host outside groups?
- What materials are the youth allowed to use? Some programs may not allow anything with staples, for example.
- What, if anything, are the youth allowed to keep with them? If youth are not allowed to keep personal items, consider saving everything for the last session and presenting everything in a well-labeled bag that the participant can get when they are discharged.
- Is there an internal behavioral ranking system you need to be aware of? What levels have the group participants achieved and how might this influence their willingness to share?

### Agency Staff

Be aware that staff from the agency may have varying degrees of education and their own personal loss and trauma histories that will influence how they interact with the youth and you as a clinician. Agency staff can be an enormous asset if they are safe adults for the youth, but they can also be a hindrance if they have poor boundaries or are too quick to reprimand group members.

### Group Demographics

It is important to remember that these groups will likely be gender-specific as most of these programs serve either males or females. If you are going to be the only woman (or man) in the room, it is something to consider. Further, be mindful of the ethnicity make-up of the group. It does not have to be a barrier, but it might be helpful to acknowledge that there are differences (if there are) between yourself and the youth. If I can tell the youth upfront, “I know I look like a middle-aged, white lady who hasn’t got a clue, but I am here to learn and try and support you, not tell you what to do,” it might ease tensions. None of these potential obstacles are insurmountable. If providing grief groups in these settings resonates with you the more prepared you can be with questions, possible solutions and creative ideas before you approach a partner agency, the better.

Time and again we have heard youth say they haven’t really had a chance to tell their grief story or they were not even sure what the meaning of grief. One female youth said at the conclusion of this summer’s group, “I learned that it is ok to never

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**All grieving young people deserve the chance to find their new normal, and I hope more of us can venture into the messier places to help them get there.**

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## Behind Bars: Providing Grief Support and Education in Non-traditional Settings

*Continued from Page 17*

get over the person you lost, you just have to learn to make a new life without them, it's called new normal." All grieving young people deserve the chance to find their new normal, and I hope more of us can venture into the messier places to help them get there.

### Resources

National Child Traumatic Stress Network  
[www.nctsnet.org](http://www.nctsnet.org)  
 National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children  
[www.starr.org/training](http://www.starr.org/training)  
 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention  
[www.ojjdp.gov](http://www.ojjdp.gov)

### References

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### About the Author

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Camp photos from the article "Compassionate Leadership: Ethical Considerations of Transitioning Grief Camp Participants to Mentoring Roles" on page 15.



## Support Among the Lockers: Grief Support in an Urban After-School Program



Alesia K. Alexander Layne, MSW, LCSW

By Alesia K. Alexander Layne, MSW, LCSW and Kottavei V. Williams

As we wipe paint from our hands, it is never more clear than now how “right” it feels to have kids running around with buckets of paint sloshing onto the grass, to guard the borders of the area so that curious on-lookers don’t fold the canvas in or knock over a paint filled cup.



Kottavei V. Williams

I am crouched low over a canvas that depicts winged black males and brick walls, and girls doing spins and handstands under a blue sky. The girls work with eyes down but speak freely about their loss histories. Kottavei our community “artist,” mixes a cup of orange and hands it to the girl that has been sitting silently, but not painting.

The whisper of the brush is the soundtrack, as soft-spoken Ashanti, age 13, talks about how hard school was for her after her mother died. She dodges a bumblebee and then turns her attention to her classmate as he nods and says a simple “yeah.” His brushstrokes are fast, bold, and uneven compared to the others gathered around the canvas. It speaks volumes.

As we listen to the stories that color the outline of the mural we are painting, we are not aware of the slamming of lockers, or the imminent arrival of busses. We just are. This is group for today. We are official school vendors permitted to work in the school established after-school program. This distinction allows us access to over 45 schools. We are allowed to function as an official offering of the school site. This is important for us as community partners because of the barriers to service and engagement that has come with safety plans and policies that keep most other community services out of the schools.

The idea of healing strategies and interventions in the landscape can be daunting. Grief support as a means to meet the needs of young people living with loss has always honored and supported meeting people “where they are.” As practitioners, we are practiced and conscious in our mission to allow the griever to trust him or herself. We seek to empower young people to find their own voice in this walk. The ability to normalize and to validate the experience of countless young people as they grieve the loss of loved ones is key to creating interventions that are timely and effective in promoting growth and instilling coping skills in young people. To do this, we had to

go into schools and the community to create environments that supported our mission and approach to support.

Evidence supports the inherent flexibility in a model that allows people to identify and create their own language rooted in their own experiences to describe their losses and their healing process. “From a *phenomenological perspective*, it might be better to try to learn, understand, and use the terms and realities people themselves use, and if those terms are diverse, we need to learn as researchers and practitioners to understand and work with that diversity” (Rosenblatt 2001, 2003). From a cultural perspective, it might be better to try to learn, understand, and use the culturally-based terms and realities used by people we serve. “We must develop thanatological languages, ways of thinking, ways of writing, and ways of practicing that are fully sensitive to that diversity” (Rosenblatt 2001, 2003).

Our groups have been held in supply closets, a football field, an abandoned portable trailer, an old church, gyms, and a corner of a lunchroom during lunch rush. In spite of the odd locales—the interventions are solid, culturally inclusive and relevant to the community and setting. The young people and adults we see are eager to share the community narrative with us, and to make a way for more access and support. We believe these kids have an intricate, central part to play in the development of the field of grief support. Programming that is flexible and resonant enough to transfer into the most unlikely of settings is essential. The beauty of grief support advocates and organizations tackling this issue, those making substantive and meaningful attempts to look at this issue in a new light, is its simplicity.

This is not only for grief support but other areas as well. Portable, mobile programming is also integral to the innovation of all youth development interventions due to their front row seat to many traumas, accidents, and deaths. It is not enough to continue placing these young people in established programs, institutions, and support groups without addressing their differences, their needs, and the nuance of their grief journey as a central factor in their treatment plans and goals. We must create new ways to reach young people, ways that honor their skills, empower their families, and uplift communities of support. The need to seek relevant, efficient ways to impart support without creating more trauma or alienation as a result of interaction within the mental health, justice, or health care system is imperative.

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**The need to seek relevant, efficient ways to impart support without creating more trauma or alienation as a result of interaction within the mental health, justice, or health care system is imperative.**

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## Support Among the Lockers: Grief Support in an Urban After-School Program

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**Kottavei V. Williams**, is a community “artist” and co-author of *Tapestries: A Creative and Inclusive Approach to Grief Support for Youth and Communities* (2013). Email: [info@tapestriesgriefsupport.com](mailto:info@tapestriesgriefsupport.com).

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## Student and New Professionals Division (SANP): Reflections on Professional Development Experiences in Grief Work



By *Brianne L. Overton, LPC, MEd, MA, CT*  
— *Chair, SANP*

Hello ADEC *Forum* readers! The new semester has arrived as we say our bittersweet goodbyes to summertime. I absolutely love the summer, the weather, days full of sunlight, and nice evenings. My favorite part about the summer is that I am fortunate to be involved in summer outreach opportunities that include grief camps and mobile grief outreach.

I work closely with bereavement centers in the St. Louis metropolitan area and volunteer my time as a facilitator, camp counselor, and helping hand when needed. This year I transitioned at Camp Courage and Camp Erin from a camp counselor to an assistant camp director. During the months prior to camp, the process consisted of interviewing new campers and volunteers, processing paperwork, learning the individual grief stories of each camper, planning activities for each camper to participate in, and creating a safe space for children and teenagers to feel and express their grief.

The second half of my summer was spent providing mobile outreach and education to day-campers in East St. Louis and Washington Park housing projects. Mobile outreach was created to allow us to serve communities that cannot get to the center for services. We partner with the community centers to provide direct care programs and mentoring through summer camp programs. As the coordinator of the program it was my responsibility to coordinate with the center leaders, establish programming, train and lead volunteers, and provide grief education to the children and teenagers served. I learned a lot this summer to say the least. I definitely fine-tuned my abilities to be flexible, to trust the process, and to lead a competent team through a successful summer.

A high percentage of children served were unaware of what grief was when first introducing the topic. As each child made her/his connections to grief, it became inevitable that each child had been affected in some way by grief and loss. Our purpose is to start or to continue an ongoing conversation about grief and how we are affected. How can you help yourself or someone else that is hurting?

We help the children identify ways to cope that actually work for them. It is important for the children and adults to know that we all grieve differently and that what works for one may not work for all. There is no wrong way to grieve, but there are healthy positive ways to express what's happening on the inside.

We stay connected to the community centers throughout the year by providing afterschool programming, offering one-on-one and family counseling, and providing education to parents/guardians and staff.

The summer has been great and I owe it to all the kiddos that I had the privilege of sharing it with. They are constant reminders of why I continue to put my heart and soul into the field of death and dying. I love what I do and do what I love and encourage you to find meaning in your work. I encourage you to stay connected not only within your community, but the greater community at large. Step outside of your comfort zone, take a different route home, explore your city, and get to know people that may not share the same values or ideas as you.

Please also connect with the ADEC Student and New Professionals by “liking” [our Facebook page](#). We hope that our Facebook page will serve as our hub of communication amongst the students and new professionals. One of our goals this year is to continue to build and grow SANP, so if you know anyone that is interested please direct them to our page so that we can get them connected.

### About the Author

**Brianne L. Overton, LPC, MEd, MA, CT**, is a doctoral student in the counselor education and supervision program at the University of Missouri—St. Louis. Her research interests include meaning reconstruction and the experience of loss in grieving teenagers as well as the western modernization of death rituals. Brianne is the Founder of BLU—Bereavement, Life, & U, which offers comprehensive death education services and community outreach and support to grieving families affected by a significant loss. She coordinates outreach opportunities through Heartlinks Grief Center and also volunteers at Camp Courage and Camp Erin both held in the St. Louis Metropolitan area. Email: [bloverton@mail.umsl.edu](mailto:bloverton@mail.umsl.edu).

## 2015 Annual Conference Report



By Fay Green, MEd, MA, LPC, LMFT,  
NCC, CT

Autumn greetings! It's hard to believe that it's been six months since many of us were in Baltimore, learning and sharing together.

April 2015 may seem a long way off, but it's not too early to begin making your plans for ADEC's 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in San Antonio, Texas, USA. Early registration will open soon and I've been hard at work preparing offerings for another enriching, educational experience.

The 2015 ADEC conference theme "**Honoring Diversity—Dying, Death, and Bereavement in a Multicultural World**" will be the foundation for some truly outstanding learning opportunities—from pre-conference specialty workshops to keynote speakers, concurrent session offerings and poster presentations.

Our keynote speakers are:

**Dr. Amy Y. M. Chow** is associate professor with the Department of Social Work and Social Administration, the University of Hong Kong. She is a member of the prestigious International Workgroup on Death, Dying and Bereavement, a registered social worker with the Hong Kong Social Workers Registration Board and a fellow in thanatology with ADEC. Dr. Chow served as director and founder of the first community bereavement counseling center in Hong Kong and later transferred her expertise in bereavement to teaching and research. Dr. Chow was first in Asia to receive the Fellow in Thanatology certification. Her achievements in bereavement research are well recognized locally and internationally. She received the ADEC 2005 Cross-Cultural Award, and in 2006, co-edited with Professor Cecilia Chan, her mentor, *Death, Dying and Bereavement: A Hong Kong Chinese Experience*.

**Reg Green** is the father of Nicholas Green, a seven-year-old child who was shot while on vacation with his parents in Italy almost twenty years ago. Their story electrified the world when Reg and Maggie, Nicholas' mother, donated their son's organs and corneas to seven very sick Italians, four of them teenagers. People from all walks of life said the decision gave them hope of a better world. It also proved to be a catalyst in Italy, where organ donation rates were next to the lowest in Western Europe. Since that time, Reg authored *The Nicholas Effect*, the story of Nicholas' gift and its impact, and has created The Nicholas Foundation to promote the gifts of organ, tissue and eye donation. Their story was also told in a made-for-television movie, "*Nicholas' Gift*," starring Jamie Lee Curtis. Nicholas' story is compelling and timely since ADEC is meeting during National Donor Awareness Month.

**Dr. Melba J. T. Vasquez** received her doctorate from the scientist practitioner counseling psychology program at the University of Texas at Austin and is an independent practitioner in Austin, Texas. Her areas of scholarship are ethics, multicultural psychotherapy, and psychology of women, supervision and training. She has provided leadership service to the profession of psychology for three decades. Dr. Vasquez, the first Latina to hold the office, was the 2011 American Psychological Association (APA) president. Her involvement as a member of the first cohort of the APA Minority Fellowship Program provided a powerful socializing process into the profession and incentive to contribute to the discipline. As the Latino population in the United States increases, Dr. Vasquez feels that Latino psychology will continue to grow, challenge stigma and break barriers.

Latest efforts have focused on finalizing the preconference specialty workshops. Plan to arrive early and take advantage of a wealth of experience and themes! Including:

- **Harold Ivan Smith** — *Funeral? Who's Got Time for a Funeral: Memorialization in a Busy, Ritual "Lite" Multicultural Society*
- **John Jordan** — *Suicide Awareness: Understanding and Responding to Suicide and Suicidality*
- **Lizzy Miles** — *Death Café: A Method for Multicultural Community Engagement*
- **William Gaventa** — *Good Grief ≠ I.Q.: Strategies and Resources for Supporting People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and their Caregivers through Loss, Grief, and End of Life Issues*
- **Robert Niemeyer assisted by Barbara Thompson** — *Grief and the Expressive Arts: An Experiential Workshop*
- **J. William Worden** — *Working with Multiple Losses*
- **Kenneth Doka** — *Understanding Grief: Generation to Generation*
- **Katherine Shear assisted by Liane Fry** — *Grief Counselor as Sherpa Guide: Intervention Strategies for Grief Care*
- **Carla Sofka** — *Adding Social and Digital Media to Your Professional Toolbox*

Watch for upcoming issues of *The Forum* and email updates for further information about ADEC's 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference. I hope you will attend and promise it will be an enriching and rewarding experience on many levels.

See you in San Antonio!

*Continued on Page 23*

## 2015 Annual Conference Report

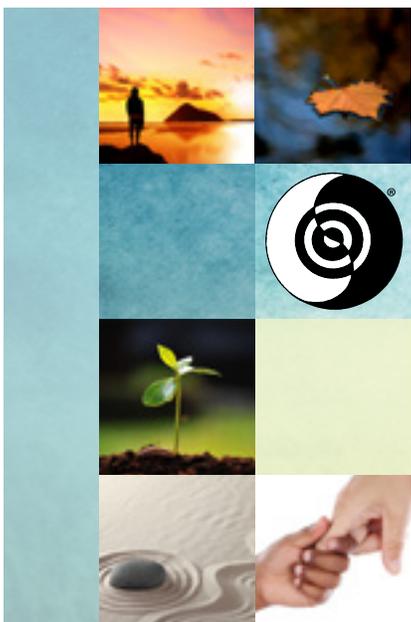
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### About the Conference Chair

**Fay Green, MEd, MA, LPC, LMFT, NCC, CT**, is an educator, licensed funeral director and therapist. She has a master's degree in education, thanatology and counseling. For the past fifteen years she has worked with individuals, children and families dealing with end-of-life issues, diagnoses of life limiting illness, education and rituals at the time of death and bereavement following death. She has been an active member of ADEC since 2005 and currently serves as a member of the Credentialing Council. Fay is a therapist in private practice in San Antonio, Texas. Email: [fay@sacenterforhopeandhealing.com](mailto:fay@sacenterforhopeandhealing.com).

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## What's New From ADEC Members



By The Rev. Paul A. Metzler, DMin

**Carson, Anne M.** *Removing the Kimono*. Melbourne, Australia: Hybrid Publishers, 2013. ISBN: 978-1-925000-24-5. Softcover, 84 pages.

**Carson**, an acclaimed poet in Australia and beyond, uses her gifted poetic voice to capture precious glimpses of the depths of loss and grief as well as the richness of the natural and human world. With additional credentials as a social worker, creative writing therapist, and visual artist, she offers 50 poems that touch the heart and open the eye, offering insight and the consolation of courage. The title poem, “*the dresser removes The Kimono of Mourning*,” engages elegant imagery to portray how the inner and outer garments of bereavement are lifted away. Other loss and grief poems in this broad collection will enable readers to allow “beauty and grit...to turn to pearl in the oyster of the soul.”

**Hodgson, Harriet.** *Seed Time: Growing from Life's Disappointments, Losses, and Sorrows*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014. ISBN: 978-1492283072. Softcover, 158 pages.

**Hodgson** draws from her own startlingly hard loss experiences when four family members died in less than 12-months and she also became the guardian for her orphaned twin grandchildren as a result of two of those deaths. In eight chapters she details the proactive steps she took to survive, to grow, and to be able to share her insights in a book designed to help other grievers. Each chapter traces her experiences and the research she undertook to explore the components of what she terms the “Hope Trail” (e.g., *Self-Awareness, Silence, Support*) toward growth and well-being. Three Appendices of additional resources complete this thoughtful and compassionate book.

**Moore, Roberta.** (Producer and Director) (2013) *Near-Death Experience. What Medical Professionals Need to Know*. [DVD]. Ft. Myers, FL: Blue Marble Films.

**Moore** has produced an important training program to enable medical professionals and other caregivers to more skillfully respond to patients who report near death experiences (NDEs). A 30-minute video includes personal and professional interviews providing an introduction to NDEs, occurrence frequency, characteristics of NDE types and protocols for medical staff to help patients and family members to integrate what is typically a profound experience. The second DVD offers substantive information for in-service training with medical staff, including .pdf versions of educational brochures, a 28-slide PowerPoint presentation, as well as questions and case illustrations for discussion and role play. While the scientific explanation of NDEs remains unsettled and incidences are often misdiagnosed, each occurrence is a legitimate patient care issue for which this training package provides needed and highly useful resources.

**Doka, Kenneth J. and Tucci, Amy S.** editors. *Living With Grief: Helping Adolescents Cope with Loss*. Washington, DC: Hospice Foundation of America, 2014. ISBN: 978-1-893349-17-9. Softcover, 384 pages.

**Doka** and **Tucci** have brought together 29 contributors in this companion volume to the 2014 Hospice Foundation of America's *Living With Grief* annual bereavement education program. Doka wrote the introduction on *Adolescent Encounters with Death: A Historical and Sociological Overview* and also Chapter 1, *Living with Life-Threatening Illness: An Adolescent Perspective*. The other authors offer 23 additional chapters that are rich with insights and interventions essential to offer appropriate help to adolescents facing loss. Many of the authors appreciate both the strengths teenagers have and the challenges they face coping with loss. Since many of the contributors are nationally recognized experts in adolescent studies this book is a significant resource for professionals who wish to understand adolescents better and be useful to them in the midst of loss.

**Stang, Heather.** *Mindfulness & Grief: With Guided Meditations to Calm Your Mind and Restore Your Spirit*. New York, NY: Cico Books, 2014. ISBN: 978-1-78249-112-5. Softcover, 144 pages.

**Stang** has drawn from the eastern Buddhist and Yoga traditions to help grievers cope with loss and grief with greater balance, peace and self-compassion. The eight chapters of her book comprise a guided program to enable meditation, relaxation, journaling and other expressive practices over a suggested eight-week period. Each chapter also anchors the mindfulness exercises to current grief research and theory, strengthening the readers' capacity to move forward knowledgeably in the midst of loss. This well-written self-help book also includes lists of references, resources and an index for further study. Its use of ancient eastern wisdom brings important insights and tools that are typically unfamiliar to present-day western grievers.

“**What's New**” offers a brief review of educational materials written or produced by ADEC members. Each review is run once and is intended to showcase the contributions of our membership to the death, dying, and bereavement field.

Send a review copy (not just an announcement) of recent material (2012 to present) to:

**The Rev. Paul A. Metzler, DMin**  
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