THE POWER OF HOPE
By Gina Dixon, M.A.
Licensed Psychologist
GSS Program Manager/Grief Therapist

As I write this column, my heart is heavy. On reflecting on the news over the past year, I can’t help but be reminded of how fragile we are as humans. As acts of violence have impacted rural and suburban communities as well as large cities, I have witnessed the very public grief of those impacted by mass shootings as well as mourned the news that 11 year old Jacob Wetterling was murdered 27 years ago.

Over the past 23 years with Grief Support Services, I have also witnessed acts of extraordinary courage and love. Each day I witness tremendous resilience in the face of terrible loss. I am frequently asked how I can bear to hear stories each day from families whose loved ones have died by homicide or other traumatic circumstances. My answer is humility and hope.

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Humility reminds me that there is nothing I can do to remove or carry someone else’s grief. Hope is found in the experience of witnessing so many grieving individuals transforming the pain of their grief into acts of love. We can feel powerless in isolation, or we can create a tapestry of love by taking personal, social or political action. We can respond to violence not with fear, but with love. Love for those who have died, but also for those who remain. Love for people we haven’t met yet, and love for ourselves. We can serve as a mirror to one another as we explore what we have lost as a result of our grief: relationships, identity, innocence, meaning and purpose. We can also explore what is left and what is yet to be. We can dare to dream new dreams together.

I draw hope from folks like Jacob Wetterling’s family who founded a resource center in their son’s name to address and prevent the exploitation of children. My heart aches for them in this time of fresh grief, and words feel woefully inadequate. Yet I find no solace in silence. What I want to say to them is thank you. Thank you for offering an alternative to focusing on the perpetrator of such terrible crimes against innocent children. Thank you for offering a way to transform our fear and anger into a movement for honoring Jacob’s life along with making the world a better and safer place for all our children.

I invite you to read more about this movement on page 6 of this newsletter. I also invite you to reflect upon your own grief journey. How have the lives of those closest to you shaped how you see yourself, your values, and how you seek new meaning and purpose after the death of a loved one? How do you keep the light of love burning in the darkest of times?

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Next GSS Bereavement Group Facilitator Training
February 15 & 16, 2017

The next Grief Support Services two-day Bereavement Support Group Facilitator Training at St. Mary’s Medical Center in Duluth will be held on February 15 & 16, 2017. This comprehensive program is designed to teach participants about the grief and bereavement process, facilitation skills, and group process. Participants will also learn how to develop and organize a grief support group.

This training is most appropriate for hospitals, hospices, churches, agencies, community groups and organizations that are developing a grief support group or are currently facilitating one. The training program is limited to 20 participants and registration is on a first come, first served basis.

The cost for the two days is $250 per person and includes lunches, breaks, all training materials, and CEUs. Trainers will include: Gina Dixon, MA, LP, Grief Therapist/Program Manager, Rebel Gustafson, MSW, LICSW, Grief Therapist, and Barb Titus, MA.

For further information contact GSS at (218) 786-4402, e-mail grievcenter@essentialhealth.org or visit our website at www.essentialhealth.org/griefsupportduluth

Trainings Available for your Organization, Agency, or School

Experienced grief and trauma therapists are available to customize a presentation or crisis support for your school district, health care facility, business, religious or volunteer institution. Topics related to grief, trauma, end-of-life care, preparing for and responding to critical incidents such as the impending death or unexpected death of a student, employee, resident, or patient can be prepared to meet your needs. Educational programs offered through St. Mary’s Grief Support Services vary from 1 hour to 3 days in length. For more information regarding availability and fees, please contact Gina Dixon, L.P. Program Manager at 218-786-4402 or gina.dixon@essentialhealth.org.
Meet GSS Volunteers: Lydia and Jeff

Lydia and Jeff are newly-trained Person to Person volunteers and are available to provide support to other couples who have experienced a stillbirth. They completed the training as a way to help others who have experienced a similar loss. They hope to make others feel they, too, can survive their tragedy.

Here is their story:

During our first pregnancy, we were induced at 35.5 weeks due to severe preeclampsia. A small but healthy boy (Blake) was born Oct. 29, 2011. Five months later we were pregnant again. Due to preeclampsia, our second pregnancy was considered high risk. Although monitored closely, at 33 weeks, our daughter’s heart stopped beating. She was delivered stillborn on November 21, 2012. We were understandably in shock and felt the physical pain of empty arms. While in the hospital, grief counselor Ben Wolfe visited us and provided helpful information. He encouraged us to name our daughter, and we named her Baby Alyssa.

Prior to losing Alyssa, Jeff lost both of his brothers while in his early twenties. All of these losses were too much for us to process alone. We signed up for counseling with Gina Dixon in Grief Support Services and went every other week for the first year. As a couple, it helped that we were both open to counseling. As a father, Jeff was unsure of what feelings he was entitled to. Gina helped by reminding us to be kind to ourselves. She pointed out we shouldn’t expect ourselves to be mind-readers, and we needed to communicate openly. She taught us valuable life skills, such as deep breathing and finding our ‘safe place’ to help us work through difficult times.

While family cared for our son, we attended the monthly Parent Grief Support Group for infant loss at St. Mary’s. We also utilized the Grief Support library. The book Stillborn: The Invisible Death helped Lydia to feel “normal”, and she could relate to what the individuals in this book had experienced. All these things helped us to cope and heal.

Our OB/GYN, Dr. Nicole Seacotte, has been amazing throughout our grief journey. She allowed us time to talk which eased our anxieties during pregnancy number three. Our daughter Haddie is healthy and full of life. Our life is happening for us again. After four years, our emotions are less erratic and our pain isn’t as intense. We have new tools to deal with stress and ways to manage intense emotions. We believe it is important to face one day at a time and to make time for ourselves. We will never forget about our Baby Alyssa. We still talk about her, and when people ask how many kids we have, our response is, “3 kids, 2 living”. Most important, knowing Alyssa is safe in Heaven gives us comfort.

If you are interested in meeting with a Person to Person Volunteer or wish to apply for volunteer training, please contact Grief Support Services at (218) 786-4402.
Kids Can Cope

This free day long camp assists young people ages 7-16 who have a relative or friend living with cancer, ALS, COPD or other serious medical conditions. Kids Can Cope provides young people the opportunity to share their concerns and develop positive coping strategies through fun age-appropriate activities. This program is sponsored by Essentia Health Grief Support Services.

The Winter program takes place on Saturday, February 25th from 10:00-2:00pm and includes lunch. A pre-registration meeting is required.

For more information regarding this program or other free grief groups for youth or adults who have experienced the death of a loved one, please email: griefcenter@essentiahealth.org or call 218-786-4402.

DONATION WISH LIST

Please contact us at 218-786-4402 or griefcenter@essentiahealth.org if you are interested in donating any of the following items to our youth program:

- Crayola markers
- Memory boxes (wooden)
- White pillow cases (new)
- Glitter glue
- Michael’s Gift Cards
- Gas cards ($15)
- Flameless Votive Candles
- Colored Pencils (8 pack)
- Child size folding table

School Based Teens Can Cope

Teens Can Cope serves students from the Northern Wisconsin and Minnesota region ages 13-18 who have experienced the death of a family member or friend. This free 5 session winter program meets at Denfeld High School, beginning the week of Monday, January 16, 2017 from 3:30 to 4:30pm.

Each meeting provides students the opportunity to learn about the grief process and openly express their grief in a confidential setting. Snacks and fun activities to explore healthy options for coping with grief are provided.

Pre-registration is required by January 9, 2017. For more information or to register, call Gina Dixon, at Grief Support Services 218-786-4402 or Mike Meyer at 218-336-8700 X1167 or stop by his Denfeld office.

Young Person’s Grief Support Program

Our Winter program begins the week of January 16, 2017. The Spring program begins in April 2017 and the Fall program will begin in October 2017.

These free groups are for young people ages 5-8 & 9-13 who have experienced the death of a family member or friend. All groups meet from 3:30-4:30pm at St. Mary’s Medical Center and includes snacks and fun activities to explore healthy options for coping with grief.

All age groups meet for 5 weekly sessions and a pre-registration meeting is required with a parent or guardian. For more information or to register please call (218) 786-4402.

These programs are available at no cost through the generous support of the Essentia Health Foundation - Grief Support Fund & St. Mary’s Auxiliary - Tree of Lights.
Coping with Sorrow on the Loss of Your Pet
By Moira Anderson Allen, M.Ed. Copyright 2007

“Coping with Sorrow on the Loss of Your Pet” provides a wealth of compassionate advice and specific coping strategies to help you deal with the pain of losing your beloved pet. The uniqueness of this book is that it is for adults. The death of a beloved pet can cause a type of “hidden sorrow” for an adult, as the significance of the loss is not recognized, dismissed or unacknowledged by others. In fact, the relationship between a human and an animal is often described as a relationship of unconditional love, loyalty, and affection. This kind of love is deep, profound and unique and thus the grief we feel is as well.

Moira Allen knows first-hand how much the loss of a pet hurts and how much it matters to know that you’re not alone, or “crazy,” to feel the way you do. She provides you with understanding and help to cope.

Coping with sorrow helps you deal with every aspect of loss and bereavement:
- Understanding what your pet meant to you and why its loss is so painful
- Dealing with the overwhelming emotions of anger, guilt, and depression
- The importance of acknowledging your feelings, and ways to express your pain
- How to adjust to your loss by adjusting your surroundings and schedule
- Helping your children and other family members cope

- Helping other pets adapt to loss
- Choosing the “right time” to euthanize a pet and how to ease the pain, strain and that guilt that this decision brings
- Creating a meaningful memorial to your beloved pet.
- Bringing a new pet into the home: choosing the right time, and the right pet
- Choosing a final resting place for your pet: understanding your options, and making a decision that is right for your lifestyle
- Helping others deal with loss

In addition, this book touches on topics that most books on pet loss never cover such as:
- How to deal with “pre-loss bereavement”.
- How to deal with the loss of a missing pet
- How to protect pets in case of a disaster or emergency
- How to cope if circumstances force you to give up a beloved pet
- How to provide for your pets in your will
- And do pets go to heaven?

This book is a must have for anyone that has a pet in their family or who are coping with the death of a beloved pet. Because there is so much additional information that could provide one with support prior to a death of an animal companion, it could be purchased or checked out of the GSS Library and read while your pet is living.

Rebel and Teddy

GSS LIBRARY
NEW BOOKS FOR LOAN

For Adults:
Coping with Sorrow on the Loss of Your Pet
By: Moira Anderson Allen, M.Ed. © 2007

For Professionals:
End-of-Life Care & Addiction
By: Young Bushfield, Suzanne & DeFord, Brad © 2010

For Kids:
Always my Brother
By: Reagan, Jean © 2009

For Teens:
When A Friend Dies
By: Gootman, Marilyn E. © 2005

To donate grief related books or money to be used to purchase additional library resources, please call 218-786-4402.
The Power of Hope (continued)

The #11 for the Jacob Movement centers around 11 simple traits. Remember and use these traits in your family or organization. Add the number 11 somewhere at your next game, concert or event to show your commitment for making the world a better place for kids. Use #11 for Jacob and JacobsHopeLives on social media to share how you are living these traits. Let’s continue to be guided by the children.

1. Be fair
2. Be kind
3. Be understanding
4. Be honest
5. Be thankful
6. Be a good sport
7. Be a good friend
8. Be joyful
9. Be generous
10. Be gentle with others
11. Be positive

Self-Compassion

Self-compassion has been shown to reduce self-criticism and improve a grieving person’s ability to reflect and learn from an experience. This inventory of self-compassion is based on a review of the literature on mindfulness-based approaches:

- Spend at least 15 minutes daily in meditation, prayer, or quiet time.
- Allocate up to 20 minutes a day of exercise within your abilities.
- Practice laughter. Every day, try to find humor in something. Smile.
- Surround yourself with caring people - family, friends, and work colleagues. Seek the company of others who are compassionate and kind.
- Get 20 minutes of sunshine daily.
- Observe and experience nature around you.
- Experience gratitude daily for the simple things in life: good health, family, running water, your home, and food.
- Think positive thoughts; notice negative self-talk, and counter with positive thoughts.
- Show compassion toward others. Look for small opportunities to help. Volunteer for a good cause at least 1 day a month.
- Support your brain: Eat a healthy diet and eliminate junk foods.
- Express your love and affection for your family/friends. Tell others how much they mean to you. Give and accept praise.
- Give yourself permission to experience self-compassion and self-love.
- Practice forgiveness, especially to yourself, and be your own best friend.

Kristine Dwyer Farewell

With the changing of the season comes a change within our department staff. I will be leaving my position as Bereavement Specialist and Volunteer Coordinator on December 8, 2016. My husband recently retired and we will be relocating to Arizona for the winter months and will also be closer to dear loved ones and precious friends. We are looking forward to the next chapter of our lives.

When I was first hired in Grief Support Services in December of 2014, I referenced the Starfish Story in Grief Notes in hopes of making a difference in the lives of grieving individuals that I encountered. I believe I have been able to achieve that goal with each impatient I visited, each grief support group I facilitated, and each volunteer I coached and assigned to support our program. “It makes a difference to this one!” is how I have seen my support role for each grieving individual I have met on the Essentia East campus. Offering a sacred space to grieve, a listening ear, validation and support have all been vital facets of my service to those in need of care.

I valued the privilege of offering a compassionate presence to those who had experienced grief and loss. My greatest joy was witnessing the strength and healing of bereaved individuals in the Senior Citizen Grief and Loss Support Group and seeing other’s lives transformed through meaningful volunteer opportunities.

I am a changed person from when I started serving on the staff of Essentia St Mary’s Grief Support Services two years ago. I have grown personally, professionally and spiritually and I count this position as one of the most meaningful positions of my whole working career. I am thankful to have been part of an amazing work team and am grateful to all who mentored me and helped me to be a better ambassador for and provider of bereavement care.
Living With Grief Conference: Supporting Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Through Serious Illness, Grief and Loss
Thursday April 13, 2017
8:30 Networking/Registration
8:45-11:15 Program/Panel Discussion
St Mary’s Medical Center Auditorium
407 East Third Street, Duluth MN

This 2.5 hour continuing education program (2 hour DVD and 30 minute local panel discussion) is designed to assist health and human services professionals and volunteers to understand the critical challenges of providing optimal end of life care and bereavement support to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families/caregivers.

The program will feature a local panel as well as the following experts brought to you by the Hospice Foundation of America

Kenneth Doka, PhD, MDiv—Professor of Gerontology, Graduate School of The College of New Rochelle; Senior Consultant, Hospice Foundation of America

Tawara Goode, MA—Director, National Center for Cultural Competence; Associate Director, University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Center for Child and Human Development, Georgetown University


For more information, please see calendar updates or to register go to our website at www.essentialhealth.org/grievesupportduluth
Email: griefcenter@essentialhealth.org or call 218-786-4402.

Calendar Updates

Adult Grief Group—Superior, WI
St. Mary’s Hospital of Superior
1st and 3rd Thursday of each month 12:00-1:00pm
Contact Sara Lund at (715) 817-7015

Resolve Infertility Support Group
Third Thursday each month 5:30-7:30 p.m.
For meeting location please contact the group leader at duluthresolve@gmail.com

Association for Death Education and Counseling
The Thanatology Association
ADEC 39th Annual Conference
April 5-8, 2017
Pre-Conference Institute April 5-8, 2017
Portland, Oregon
www.apec.org

GSS Bereavement Facilitator Training
February 15-16, 2017
To Register or for more information call 218-786-4402 or email griefcenter@essentialhealth.org or visit our website to download application materials at: Essentialhealth.org/grievesupportduluth

Tree of Lights
Sunday, December 4, 2016 @ 2:00pm
A memorial book of names will be on display throughout the Holiday season—see page 2 for more information.

Living With Grief Conference:
Supporting Individuals with IDD (Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities)
Thursday April 13, 2017

Registration is limited. The early registration fee is $30 ($40 after April 5th) and includes morning refreshments and 2.5 CEU’s for Social Workers and nurses. A certificate of attendance will be provided for all others. There is not a companion book available for this program.

Learning Objectives
1. Describe critical issues that emerge in the medical management of life-limiting illness in individuals with IDD
2. Describe ways that grief is manifested in persons with IDD
3. Identify national and local resources and initiatives for individuals with IDD and family members who are ill or grieving
4. Discuss intervention approaches and strategies to assist people with IDD and their families who are ill or grieving
Grief Support Services
Group Information

Call Grief Support Services, (218) 786-4402 for further information. ALL GROUPS ARE FREE OF CHARGE and meet in the 2E classroom (RM 2216) by the Chapel on the 2nd floor of St. Mary’s Medical Center, 407 East Third Street, Duluth, MN 55805.

- **Senior Citizen Grief and Loss Support Group**
  10:00-11:30 a.m. (Meets the second and fourth Wednesday of each month).

- **Adult Grief Support Group**
  7:00-8:30 p.m. (Meets the third Tuesday of each month).

- **Young Widow/Widower Grief Support Group**
  7:00-8:30 p.m. (Meets the second Wednesday of each month).

- **Parent Grief Support Group (Miscarriage/Stillbirth & Infant Loss)**
  7:00-8:30 p.m. (Meets the second Tuesday of each month).

- **Parent Grief Support Group (Child, Adolescent or Adult Child Loss)**
  7:00-8:30 p.m. (Meets the fourth Tuesday of each month).

- **Suicide Family Members Support Group** (For family members 18 and older of those who have died as a result of suicide.) 7:00-8:30 p.m. (Meets the third Monday of each month).

- **Young Person’s Grief Support Program** (pre-registration meeting required)
  Winter program begins in January 16, 2017
  Spring program begins in April 2017
  Fall begins in October 2017

- **Kids Can Cope** (for 7-16 year olds) who have a relative or friend living with a serious medical condition (pre-registration meeting required)
  The Winter program takes place on Saturday, February 25th from 10:00-2:00pm