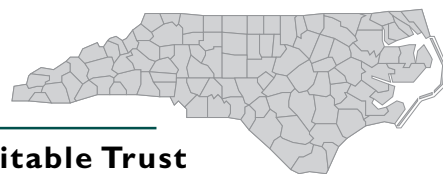


OutReach



A Publication of the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust

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Volume 7, Number 1

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**Bereavement
Support Programs
for Children and
Youth**

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**For more informa-
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Kate B. Reynolds
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about specific grant
programs, contact
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Hospice Programs Support Children During Times of Personal Loss



Bereavement support and grief management programs, such as the Grief in the School program of Palliative Care Center and Hospice of Catawba Valley, work to help youngsters develop coping skills and find renewed hope for the future.

Nothing says “hope for the future” like the smiling faces of happy children. Childhood is universally regarded as a happy and carefree time, when boys and girls concentrate on play and learning before they begin shouldering the responsibilities of adulthood.

Yet, for children who have experienced personal grief, dark shadows often lurk behind the seemingly bright smiles. Over the past decade, changes in lifestyles and growing insecurity in the world around us have accentuated the need for individual and group support for people of all ages. For children, in particular, the unexpressed fear, guilt, and sadness that often follow traumatic life changes, especially the loss of people who are important in their lives, threaten their basic happiness — both now and in the future.

Bereavement support programs have long been a basic service of Hospice chapters across North Carolina. However, until recent years, most bereavement programs were directed to adults or were intergenerational efforts planned to reach family members of all ages.

In recognition of a growing awareness of the unmet needs of grieving children, several Hospice organizations have initiated bereavement support programs designed specifically to address the issues young people are often left to face alone.

Kids Path, Greensboro

Kids Path of Hospice and Palliative Care of Greensboro, Inc. began in 1992 and is one of the state’s largest youth programs. It is unique in its dual focus, which includes both a comprehensive

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Kids Path Hospice and Palliative Care of Greensboro, Inc.

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Meghan Davis
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The Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust awarded a three-year grant of \$277,490 for operating funds to expand and enhance the medical component targeted toward financially needy children served by the Kids Path program.

Camp Sunshine Appalachian District Health Department Hospice

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The Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust awarded a grant of \$40,764 for operating funds for the bereavement portion of the hospice program serving terminally ill patients. One of the activities funded by this grant was Camp Sunshine.

Kids Path, Greensboro
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grief support and school outreach program and a home care program serving children with life-limiting conditions.

Children eligible for Medicaid's Community Alternatives Program for Children (CAP-C) and Personal Care Services (PCS) are a primary target population for Kids Path. The program currently provides home care services to 30 medically fragile children, a large majority of whom are Medicaid eligible. Through its bereavement support program, it reaches more than 300 Greensboro youth each year.

"In the United States in an average year, roughly 55,000 children die and one million children are ill with life-limiting medical conditions," said Meghan Davis, head of counseling and support services for Kids Path. "In spite of these numbers, fewer than half of the nation's Hospice programs offer services for children. Through Kids Path, we have embraced pediatric palliative and hospice care as a specialty, and it is one of our fastest growing programs."

In implementing the pediatric home care program, Kids Path defined four levels of care that could be accessed, depending on the needs of each family: **hospice**, for children with less than a six-month life expectancy; **home health**, for children with skilled nursing needs; **transitional care management** to promote health maintenance among children with chronic disease; and **bereavement support**.

"One of the strengths of our pediatric palliative care program is our 'team approach' to home care. For our children and their families, we provide the services of a team volunteer, a nurse, a social worker, and a physical therapist as well as a counselor and a chaplain. We realize that their needs reach beyond the physical to the spiritual and emotional aspects of life. These services are available across all four levels of care," Davis continued.

The second focus of Kids Path is providing care to grieving children. Referrals come to Kids Path from parents and caregivers, as well as from the local school system. Many children receive individual counseling that incorporates both play therapy and arts and crafts activities to help children relax and to stimulate conversation.

Children may also participate in one of four age-appropriate support groups.

- Kindergarten through 5th grade students and their parents who have experienced the death of a loved one are invited to the **Connecting Rainbows** group.
- Kindergarten through 5th grade children who are struggling with the illness of an important person in their life can share their

feelings with others as part of a Kids Helping Kids group.

- Middle schoolers who find themselves facing bereavement issues in addition to the stresses of adolescence in general are invited to the **Pathfinders** group.

- High schoolers meet together in the **Lost and Found** group, which is open to any teen dealing with the death or illness of a family member or friend.

Over the past year, Kids Path has introduced two day-long events. The first is called CHAMP Camp (**Children Healing And Making friends through Play**) and is directed to first through fifth graders. Children enjoy arts and crafts, go fishing, and invite their families in for a bonfire in the evening.

The second event is an outdoor teen retreat, which centers around a high-and-low ropes course experience. Participants practice applying everyday life skills to successfully completing their outdoor adventure.

Because of the success of Kids Path in Greensboro, it serves as a model for similar programs that have been started in Asheboro, Asheville, Burlington, Charlotte, High Point, Wilmington, Charleston, S.C., and Dunbar, W.V.

Camp Sunshine, Boone

The outdoor camping environment is the setting chosen by Appalachian District Health Department in planning an annual bereavement support event for Ashe, Watauga, and Alleghany children.

"Children grieve differently from adults," said Sandy Sims, Appalachian District Health Department social worker and director of Camp Sunshine. "When a family member dies, children feel fear and sadness, but they may not express these feelings as an adult would. Particularly for young children, their feelings may be complicated by the unavailability of other family members who are still trying to deal with their own grief.

"During Camp Sunshine, we plan activities that are fun along with some that help children develop the tools they need to cope with their feelings. Most importantly, we surround them with volunteers who also have experienced grief. At this year's camp, our children ranged in age from six to eleven years old. Our volunteers ranged in age from late teens to early sixties."

Camp volunteers receive ample preparation for sharing with children in a calm and caring way. They learn how children characteristically respond at certain developmental levels. Preschoolers and elementary school children view life from an egocentric perspective. Since they often see themselves as the cause of whatever happens around them, an offhand comment from an adult or their own memory of having "wished" bad



Busy days and the camaraderie of others who have experienced changes in their lives help children begin the healing process at "CHAMP Camp," a program of Kids Path of Greensboro.

Grief in the School **Palliative Care Center and Hospice of Catawba Valley, Inc.**

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The Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust awarded a grant of \$53,300 for operating funds to begin a Grief in the School program for children who have experienced the loss of a significant person in their lives.

things for a person can create guilt and fear that cannot be erased until they are expressed.

"Talking with the same volunteer each day and enjoying the camaraderie of the other campers often encourages children to express their deepest thoughts," Sims said.

The work of Camp Sunshine volunteers sparked important breakthroughs with two campers this year. The first was a child who shared with a volunteer that he thought he had killed his mother. His feelings of guilt originated when his mother told him, "it's killing me to leave you." He had carried that burden of guilt alone and totally unexpressed until he came to the camp.

A second child, whose family member had committed suicide, overheard an adult visitor to his home say that people who commit suicide go to hell. Since hearing that comment, the child's sense of loss had been compounded by fear and worry over his loved one's eternal punishment. Yet, he had told no one, until he was in Camp Sunshine's safe healing environment.

How do Camp Sunshine volunteers accomplish such breakthroughs? "We tell children the truth," Sims said. "We let them know that losing someone always hurts. Others who experience the death of a loved one feel the same kind of hurt. Once they know they aren't alone, they can begin healing."

Activities at the camp are designed to start the healing process.

- Campers make courage sticks and decorate them. While they are decorating, they talk about some of the things they fear.

- They make memory boxes and memory stones to help them remember happy times with their loved ones. In the memory box, they place a letter and special mementos. Opening the box helps them recapture the feelings of love, security, and fun that were part of the life they shared with this special person.

- They also make a kaleidoscope. "Kaleidoscopes represent change," said Sims. "We want the children to know that when life changes, they will feel a sense of loss ... but over time other changes will bring good times back into their lives."

Following their Camp Sunshine experience, many children stay in touch with Sims or other camp volunteers.

Camp Sunshine is part of the bereavement support program for people of all ages in Ashe, Watauga, and Alleghany counties.

Grief in the School, Hickory

Because children spend so much of their time at school, Palliative Care Center and Hospice of Catawba Valley was eager to respond to school counselors' requests for assistance in helping children deal with issues of loss and grief. In January 2001, Hospice counselors introduced the

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2004-2005 Important Dates:

Satellite Offices

Wilmington
December 6-10, 2004

Greenville
January 10-14, 2005

Health Care

Grant Application
Deadlines:
September 15, 2004
March 15, 2005

Poor and Needy

Grant Application
Deadlines:
January 15, 2005
July 15, 2005

Grief in the School,
Hickory
(Continued from Page 3)

Grief in the School program and began working with staff and students of the Catawba County Schools and the New Conover and Hickory city school systems.

An essential part of Grief in the School is educating teachers to identify and respond appropriately to students' unspoken cries for help. Teachers who have participated in sessions led by Hospice staff are better prepared to establish a learning environment that guides children toward grief reconciliation, healthier coping, and more positive academic outcomes.

One of the initial efforts targeted directly to students was the development of a puppet show for third graders. To encourage participation, the puppet show is short and entertaining and leaves time for discussion and sharing among students, teachers, and the Hospice presenters. Students who exhibit a need for follow-up counseling are invited to weekly individual or group support sessions, offered during the school day.

"Our children are often 'forgotten mourners' and their losses go unacknowledged and unresolved," said Amy Eller, program director. "Once we identify a student who is facing



Children understand butterflies as a symbol of hope. Campers at Camp Sunshine and at New Beginnings release butterflies as part of their closing ceremonies.

issues of grief and loss, we use a variety of interventions, such as play therapy, art, and journaling to help them express their feelings. As they begin to respond, they have fewer behavioral problems, they manage anger and frustration better, and their academic performance improves."

Many of the students who receive counseling during the year are invited to attend a summer grief recovery experience entitled New Beginnings. During the afternoon, families of the children join them for fun activities and a time of remembering. At the end of the day-long camp, the children release butterflies to symbolize hope and new beginnings.

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