



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS SOUTHEASTERN NEW BRUNSWICK CHAPTER **NEWSLETTER**

The mission of The Compassionate Friends is to assist families in the positive reconciliation of grief following the death of a child of any age and from any cause, and to provide information to help others be supportive.

September 2018, Quarterly Issue 2

We are pleased to provide the second newsletter from our Chapter. We received some positive comments on the first newsletter, so we will continue to try to provide helpful resources to bereaved parents. To reduce the onus of putting together a regular newsletter, we are providing, for the most part, articles taken from other Compassionate Friends newsletters.

Monthly Meetings

Our monthly support meetings usually take place at 6:00 pm the second Sunday evening of each month unless that day happens to occur on a special day, such as Mother's Day, in which case our meeting is the following Sunday. Meeting reminders are sent to everyone on the email list during the week before the meeting. Our meetings presently take place at the Town of Riverview Boardroom at 55 Biggs Drive in Riverview, across from the Dobson arenas.

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Facebook – The Compassionate Friends of Canada Southeastern New Brunswick Chapter

We do not intentionally release participant contact information, such as phone numbers or email addresses. We encourage participants who want to connect with each other outside our meetings to exchange this information directly.

Upcoming Events

- Our next three meetings are scheduled for September 9, October 14, and November 11 to be confirmed by a reminder email.

- Our annual balloon release will be replaced by a memorial event, as there is widespread objection to balloon releases because of injury to wildlife and the environment. Our memorial event will take place September 22 with details to follow in a separate email.
- Our next 8-week intensive Grief Reconciliation Program, offered twice a year, will be offered in the Spring of 2019 with dates yet to be confirmed.
- Hospice Grief & Bereavement is a series of 7 sessions to discuss ways to cope with grief providing a safe, supportive and healing environment for adults living with grief to explore their feelings of loss. It is a place to meet others who are walking the same journey. This free program may help one make sense of the feelings and changes experienced following the death of a loved one. Contact Hospice Greater Moncton 383 2404 or info@hospicegm.ca. This is a general loss program, not limited to bereaved parents.

The Stigma of Drug Overdose: A Mother's Story

Denise Cullen has lived through one of the worst tragedies a mother can experience – losing a child. But if there is anything worse than losing a child, it is losing a child to a drug overdose, because grief is accompanied by stigma and blame.

Denise lost her only son, Jeff, when he was 27 years old to a fatal combination of morphine and Xanax. She remembers him as “warm, open, loving, bright and stubborn. He had a huge laugh and a fabulous smile,” she says. He was also impulsive and suffered from ADD. “We were very, very close,” Denise recalls. “Even during those horrible years [of drug use], he and I never became distant from each other. It was torturous at times but the one thing that was always, always apparent was that he loved his family and his family loved him. No matter what.” Jeff began using drugs in the 9th grade, possibly to self-medicate his ADD. Over the next 12 years he experimented with a variety of drugs, including his final drug of choice, opiates. During those years, “Jeff tried so, so hard to stop,” says Denise. “He felt ‘broken’ and guilty for the hurt he inflicted on his parents. He once wrote about his ‘fairy tale life’ that he had screwed up so badly, and his self-esteem was gone toward the end. But he always took total responsibility for what he did.”

For Denise, the pressure and fear of watching her only child battle addiction was “like a roller coaster with good periods and crashes. You learn to be hyper-vigilant, living always with fear. You have hope as well – as long as they are alive you have hope, but the sound of the phone ringing at night, or not hearing from them in a normal way, is very difficult. It’s always in the back of your mind that your child could die in some way as a result of their addiction. You may think you can imagine it, that you are in a way prepared...but you are not.”

The fateful day arrived on August 5, 2008. Jeff was at the beach with a friend waiting for a bed to open up in a long-term rehab facility. Denise remembers that he was happy and hopeful about the treatment center. “I called him in the afternoon to ask when he would be home,” says Denise. “He said he’d call, but hadn’t done so by 6:30 or 8:30pm. Finally at 10pm I called and left a very angry message. I was upset that he was acting like ‘the old days’ and making [his parents] worry. He never got those last messages. He was lying on the grass in a nice neighborhood...dying.”

According to eyewitnesses – and shockingly, there were many – Jeff was lying on the grass starting around 4:30pm. He lay very near a curb where cars parked on an active street, yet no one stopped to ask what a clean, good-looking kid was doing motionless on the grass. At 11pm a woman finally called police, saying that Jeff hadn't moved an inch in two hours. The time of death was around 10pm. He could have been saved. "At around 3:00am a very kind man, a Sheriff from the Orange County Coroner's Office, rang our doorbell," says Denise. "He had Jeff's wallet, keys, phone, and beach gear... I am not a dramatic person but I fell to the floor and screamed until I couldn't scream anymore and simply made sounds like a wounded animal."

Losing her only son was the worst kind of pain Denise could imagine, and she began visiting grief groups for parents. To her shock and chagrin, parents whose children had died of non-drug-related means were judgmental about Jeff's overdose. "I could actually feel people move their chairs away from me [when they heard Jeff had died of an overdose]," says Denise. "They had an attitude like 'your child chose what killed him. Mine didn't.'" But judgment and accusation didn't stop Denise. She left the traditional grief groups to found her own chapter of GRASP (Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing), for parents who also bear the unique stigma attached to drug overdose. GRASP was originally founded by Pat and Russ Wittberger of San Diego, but after they stepped down, Denise and her husband volunteered to take over. Today GRASP has 43 chapters in 24 states and offers healing and advice to parents in mourning. "My advice to parents is to learn as much as they possibly can about addictive illness and drug use from responsible sources early on," says Denise. "Talk honestly about the risk factors of becoming addicted by 'experimenting,' talk about family history of alcohol or substance abuse."

Denise and her husband Gary also founded Broken No More, a non-profit that works to change how substance abuse is viewed by the public and to fight failed drug policies. Run by people dealing with substance abuse issues in their families, the organization advocates for sterile syringe availability, 911 Good Samaritan laws that encourage witnesses to an overdose to call for help, and greater access to naloxone, an antidote to opiate overdose. Most importantly, Denise believes that to resolve the overdose crisis, people whose lives have been touched by this issue need to speak up.

"We must get loud about overdose," she says. "During the AIDS crisis, nothing was done until the gay community spoke up, then help came by the bucketful. Now, not only has the disease become more manageable, but the stigma has been reduced as well. With overdose, we must address both these elements. We must research addiction and find better treatments and a cure. It can be done. We just have to care enough to do it."

By NC Harm Reduction Coalition, <http://www.dailykos.com>, from TCF Kamloops, B.C

Seasons of Grief

Jeanne Davis, Chapter Leader - TCF Green Bay

Do you ever wonder “when is winter going to end?” When is it going to get warmer? When will the snow melt and the spring flowers come up? When will they bloom?

Grief can be compared to the seasons. All of those questions can also be asked of grief. When will my pain end? When will I feel something other than pain? When will the shock and numbness go away? When will I be able to remember and smile?

Autumn is a sudden frost – the first moments of our child’s passing. Life has changed forever and everything feels strange and unfamiliar. Our emotions shift like the wind; one moment we feel the warmth of fond remembrance and the next we are startled back into our horrible reality. Our child who we love is gone! We drift through most of those first days in a fog. We become exhausted to the point of numbness and time stands at a strange angle to the rest of the world. In the winter of our bereavement, one of the most tragic points in our life will come when the gripping reality of what it means to lose our child crashes down around us. Life changes so much that it is almost unrecognizable to us. This is the time when we might fall down and not find a reason to continue on. Depression and illness run rampant at this time because we feel helpless. The grief can cast a harsh, ugly light onto everything around us. We may be mad and angry at anything and everything.

The emotions we begin to experience in the spring of our grief are the first signs of our re-awakening from the winter of that grief. Our loss is like a wind or hail storm, where everything we knew and understood is battered by furious waves of despair that threaten to consume us at any moment. Somehow, though, something happens within us – some instinct to survive rises up within us to help carry us forward. We literally allow life to begin again for us; not quite the life that we knew; but, a life that we are still able to live.

Summer is a warm wind of peace, of sunshine, warm showers, blue skies, and fluffy clouds. It is the time in our loss that we can actually look forward to what we have gained, rather than look back to what we have lost.

Just as the seasons of the earth go full circle, so will the seasons of our grief. Life will not be normal again; normal is a word that passes with our loved ones. But, we will eventually find a new normal, a new reality. Grief doesn’t go away, it changes. Life won’t ever be the same; but, it can become bearable and livable. We will be able to laugh again without feeling guilt and to take loss from its position of being our sole reason to live to a reason for having lived. To move forward after loss is not to forget our child; but, rather, to remember the life of that child with feelings of love, joy, fondness, and peace.

Our grief doesn’t necessarily follow the seasons in order. It may mix them up and repeat them in no understandable order. Be gentle with yourself, give your grief the space it needs; but, open your heart and your mind and go forward into your new reality. You will smile, laugh, and feel again.

From Compassionate Friends of Green Bay

Library News

We have a small chapter library which has been donated by a parent for our participants to use. Please just sign the borrowing list and take what you want to read. It is our intention to increase our library resources as our donations permit. We are initially choosing to purchase new books that have been recommended by the national librarian of The Compassionate Friends. Our library includes all the pamphlets that are provided by the national office. Please take any of these that interest you.

Book Reviews

We would like to include brief book reviews in our newsletters, in the hope these might help others to benefit from your reading. If you are willing to review a book, please email us your review of it.

The following is the first book we purchased from the list provided by the national office, and this book is now part of our library.

How to Survive the Worst That Can Happen, Sandy Peckinpah, 2015, recommended by the national office of The Compassionate Friends of Canada

Sandy is a bereaved mother and a bereaved wife who writes from a Christian perspective to bereaved mothers. She gives full respect to non-Christian religious traditions, and there is a lot in the book to benefit bereaved fathers. She describes the effects on parents that come from the death of their child, and she provides advice and practices to help survive and eventually to thrive and achieve ``breakthrough to happy``. After losing her 16-year old son suddenly to bacterial meningitis, and documenting her experience by journaling, Ms Peckinpah has written a practical and accessible guide to coping, covering many essential topics; a good place to start the grief journey. A very positive message.

Chapter Finances

There is no fee to participate in any of our chapter programs. The entire Compassionate Friends organization is made up of volunteers. We do welcome donations to cover such expenses as library resources, brochures that we distribute in the community, special events, and an annual donation of \$50 to the national office to help support their support of us.

SHARING

It will be our practice to share your submitted comments with our readers, as they often benefit others. Each of us handles our grief differently, so we ask for your tolerance and understanding with compassion for the submissions presented. If you wish to submit a writing for Sharing in our next newsletter, please email it to us at moncton@TCFCanada.net .

Fredericton Tragedy

Licensed psychologist Anjula Siddhartha recently provided an article to the Moncton Times & Transcript newspaper, *Focus on healing as a community*, with respect to the recent tragic deaths in Fredericton. The following is the last paragraph of this article.

"It is the 'we' feeling which provides the first glimmer of hope to individuals affected by trauma. Unconditional positive regard and acceptance of self is accelerated by peer support. Community network helps develop interpersonal skills, which are an antidote for the social isolation experienced by trauma sufferers. Emotional regulation skills get a boost by feelings of altruism, which group participants get when they help a fellow group member. If a person is having flashbacks, community members can talk about their own experiences of handling trauma or similar losses."

Quote for Reflection

"When we meet real tragedy in life, we can react in two ways -- either by losing hope and falling into self-destructive habits, or by using the challenge to find our inner strength."

The Dalai Lama