

LET THE COMMUNITY LEAD

Grief Support For All



20 ANNUAL IMPACT
23 REPORT



Gerard's House
...for grieving children



Bridging Grief's Divide for Children and Adults alike

Q: *Gerard's House is for grieving kids and families, right?*

A: *Yes!*

Q: *What about adults who are going through grief? Do you have anything for them?*

A: *Yes! Gerard's House has free grief support for adults in English and in Spanish. In 2023, we served a total of 359 grieving adults through all the services described on the next page.*

Though Gerard's House has been supporting adults since 1997, it was in 2014 that one volunteer expanded this program in a transformational way. Many others have continued to build on that expansion until today, when hundreds of grieving adults receive grief support each year. The cast of characters that puts all this together include volunteer facilitators, collaborative partners, funders, board members and staff. Though most will not be mentioned by name here, all are remembered and appreciated, alongside the grieving support group members themselves.

By all accounts it is the group participants who make the most significant contribution of all to one another's healing, standing by one another in ways no one else can. If you are in any of these categories of contributors, we see you and thank you!

Here's an overview of adult services and how they came into being:



SINCE THE BEGINNING

Gerard's House has always provided some support for grieving adults. The following four services have been offered from the beginning: Parenting-in-Grief support groups for parents currently led by volunteer, Kate Drahn, Stepping Stones support when a family member has a life-threatening illness, Crisis response for adults (and kids) when a death affects a school and trainings about grief for schools, community groups, organizations and individuals.

IN 2014

Unless you were a parent of a grieving child, you would have been referred elsewhere for an adult grief support group. All that changed when Bob Dorsett, a longtime Gerard's House volunteer proposed a year-round, weekly support group for adults grieving a death of someone important to them – a group Bob still facilitates to this day. It wasn't long before Bob's group was so full that not everyone could fit in the room. When volunteer Sarah Heartt saw the need for another group, she stepped in to facilitate a second weekly adult group. Now there was one daytime and one evening group in English.

IN 2016

With school-based Nuestra Jornada groups successfully underway for those students grieving a death and or immigration-related losses, Gerard's House was finally ready to add an adult grief support group in Spanish. This group started small, with a few parents of student participants, but soon other grieving adults joined, too. Started by Roxana Melendez and volunteer Rosario Torres, this group is currently led by Maggie Boyle.

IN 2017

Roxana Melendez worked with Las Cumbres to create a Nuestra Jornada youth group specifically for teen moms and their babies. Because this Moms Sharing and Healing group was such a success right away, it quickly expanded to support young adult parents as well, along with their babies and families.

IN 2020

The onset of the pandemic brought challenges. Groups moved to Zoom, which was a difficult transition for some participants across the board. And at the same time, for a confluence of reasons, adult intake calls and referrals in English skyrocketed. Gerard's House was one of only a few places in northern New Mexico offering free behavioral health services, and more grieving adults were in need. The organization was not staffed for this influx, but adapted by creating a position with more focus on adult grief support, hiring Program Manager Bridget Hinton in 2022. Bridget now anchors adult services, devoting much-needed attention to fielding intake calls in English and in Spanish, supporting new grieving adults through the process of being placed in a group, coordinating with group facilitators, and referring adults to other services they may need.

IN 2023

Our team expedited the connections with grieving adults, making an impact in the community and resulting in even more intake calls. The demand led to the expansion of English-language adult bereavement groups, but with 15 members per group, we recognized the need for a third group. Our Program Coordinator Alison Janes proposed an art-based group, initially met with hesitation but eventually embraced. The art-focused group proved immensely successful, quickly dividing into two groups due to high demand. These art groups, occurring every ten weeks alongside regular groups, offer a unique rhythm that fosters open sharing and camaraderie. Participants appreciate the non-performative nature of art, allowing genuine expression and exploration of grief without judgment.





Group Facilitator Shares Keys to Successful Grief Support

When you walk into Gerard's House, you'll see a placard with handouts that have helped hundreds of grieving adults, in English and in Spanish. These handouts, also available on Gerard's House's website, are excerpts from Bob Dorsett's book *The Grieving Heart: A Simple Guide to Healing from Life's Many Losses*. Bob co-facilitates a Gerard's House group with a former group participant, and 42 grieving adults benefitted from their group this past year. Bob shares this about his approach:

Periodically, I give presentations to students who are studying to be therapists. And I ask them the question: *'Tell me what you think the most important quality is to be with grieving people.'* And I always receive many different responses. Then I tell them: The number one criterion is that you do your own grief work. There are messages going on all the time (in the group), and you can only register what other people are feeling if you've done your own grief work.

Secondly, you have to have a belief that people who are grieving can heal themselves. If you set yourself up to be a grief guru and you have the answers, you're missing the boat. Take a back seat except for facilitating them supporting each other.

Every person comes to group reticent to share their intimate feelings of grief. They all ask the questions, 'Am I going to be safe? Are they going to understand me?' Outside of that room, most people don't know how to respond. But when people experience the love and support of other people without judgment, they say, 'This feels really good.' And they remember that. It bonds them together. They like seeing each other. And they know they're safe.

In a participant's words:

"I would not be where I am today, in my grief journey, if I had not attended Bob's group at Gerard's House. Because of the group I actually feel like I have a future to look forward to now."

SHARING OUR GRIEF

To Heal Ourselves and Others

“When I attend the support group, I find that other people have experiences, feelings and struggles that are just like mine. When I share how overwhelming my grief is, the support group members have replied, ‘We’ve been there. We understand you.’ Knowing that someone understands me is powerfully comforting at this critical time in my life.”

-participant in adult grief support facilitated by Sarah Heartt

“I personally don’t have anyone to talk to about how I feel, and in the group, I know I can do it without anyone saying that I’m exaggerating, and I feel safe.”



- Participant in Moms Sharing and Healing

“I’ve learned to have more patience and give it time and that the pain sometimes is not so bad. It is part of grief to feel pain, anger, sadness and you have to let it flow through you. I’ve also learned to respect the pain of my children and let them live their grief so they can go through the sadness too.”

- Participant in Nuestra Jornada Adult Group



Youth Program Updates

NUESTRA JORNADA YOUTH

The 220 participants served in these weekly groups are children and teens with immigrant roots grieving because of deaths, as well as in response to familial losses such as deportation, incarceration, parental abandonment, kidnapping and separation by borders.

We facilitated 18 groups at 11 different Santa Fe Public Schools and 2 evening groups hosted at Gerard's House. The increase in consistent weekly attendance in all our groups was part of bouncing back after the pandemic.

Our theme for this year's Summer Family Night was "What brings us comfort in times of loss?" which included rock climbing at the Mountain Center and an iron-on patch quilt activity facilitated by the Folk Art Museum to memorialize the people and places families miss most.



GRIEF CONNECTIONS YOUTH

Our foundational program serves youth ages 3 -21 who are grieving the death of an important person in their lives.

This fall in our group for 4-6-year-olds, families were invited to join the group in last session to see the memorializing altar their children had created and to join in. It was validating not only to grieve together, but also to celebrate that families are healing through this. It had the quality of ritual, and each person received a rose to take home. This was a theme in 2023 as we welcomed partners from other organizations like SITE Santa Fe and We Grow Eco to co-create original grief-related rituals and projects for our groups.



Indigenous Grief Support

WOE BIDI - MEDICINE MOUND

Our satellite group at Ohkay Owingeh Community School served 20 grieving students this year and recently completed its third semester of groups. 4 of the 12 students who attended this fall semester had experienced the death of both parents.

Based on the success of this group over the past year and a half we have been invited to co-create similar grief support groups at Santo Domingo Pueblo. After providing Grief 101 presentations for staff at each school, we are also piloting "grief activity kits" that staff members at Ohkay Owingeh, Espanola Valley High School and McCurdy Charter School can distribute to students and families who have experienced a loss.

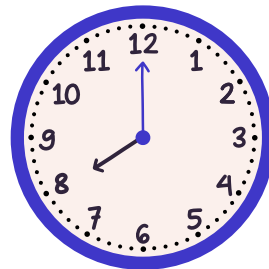
While we work to build capacity for more peer grief groups in this area, we hope these kits filled with grief-related art activities and helpful articles for caregivers can provide immediate support for bereaved Indigenous families.



"THAT STUDENT FELT SPECIAL WHEN HE GOT TO STEP AWAY FROM CLASS TIME AND SEE SOMEONE WAS THINKING OF HIS FEELINGS AND MAKING TIME FOR THEM. HE DIDN'T HAVE TO TELL ANYONE WHAT THE GROUP WAS FOR, BUT WHEN HE CAME BACK, HE WOULD BE MORE INVOLVED WITH HIS CLASSMATES AND NOT STAY IN HIS SHELL SO MUCH."

-Teacher at Ohkay Owingeh Community School

We Love Our Volunteers!



52
VOLUNTEERS



5,430
VOLUNTEER HOURS

2023 Highlights

262 families received wrap-around casework for urgent needs beyond grief

38 grieving families applied for \$233,750 in City and County Uptogether cash assistance during a one-time clinic in collaboration with Father's New Mexico and Earthcare

NUMBERS SERVED JANUARY-DECEMBER 2023

19 TRAININGS



23 WEEKLY GROUPS



1,121 INDIVIDUALS



359 ADULTS



762 CHILDREN



EVALUATING IMPACT

The average adult response for "I felt supported by others BEFORE coming to the group" was 1 with no responses above a 2



The average response AFTER coming to the group was 5

In 2023, 52% of Grief Connections youth participants experienced the death of a father, 13% percent experienced the death of a mother and 35% experienced the death of an important person such as a sibling, grandparent or aunt/uncle.

2,440 HOURS

were contributed to groups by our graduate interns