



Bereavement

Healing the Wound of Loss



Grief is a universal experience that affects us all at some point in our lives. It is also deeply personal - no two losses are alike, and there is no single 'recipe' for healing that works for everyone.

In order to heal from a loss we need to mourn; to find an outward expression of the deep emotions brought by the

loss. This is the work of grief. This Hospice publication is dedicated to exploring some of the things that may help us to heal after a loss.

In these pages you will read about how individuals and whole communities have found comfort and healing in their own unique way.

You will also read about how

embracing a new perspective may create the shift needed to start healing.

Irish poet and philosopher John O'Donohue said

"when the work of grief is done, the wound of loss will heal"

We hope the stories shared here may help you to embrace the work of grief and begin healing when the time is right.

The Feelie Heart Story



Dr. Rachel Remen tells a poignant story from her practice as a compassionate caregiver for those who live and die with cancer. One of her patients, a young mother of thirty-seven, had died of breast cancer. Dr. Remen met with the grieving husband and his four-year-old daughter Kimmie:

"We sat in silence watching Kimmie as she gently patted my cat. Feeling herself watched, she looked up. Reaching into her pocket, she took something out and put it into my hand. It was a small stuffed velvet heart, obviously handmade. I looked at her father. 'It's a feelie heart,' he said."

'She never goes anywhere without it.' Small enough to put into a pocket and take to school, these soft little hearts give children permission to hold their own hearts tenderly and to grieve. To remember that they were loved and know that they can love. Children carry them for as long as they need to, finding comfort in the softness when thoughts of their loss might otherwise overwhelm them. Deeply moved, I held the little heart out to Kimmie. She took it and held it against her cheek for a long moment. Her mother had loved her fiercely. Perhaps that love could be a place of refuge for Kimmie now."

Today, the feelie heart story has reached far and wide.

Thousands of these little hearts have been sewn by volunteers around the world and they are used by children, adults and many health professionals.

Here in Yukon, Hospice volunteers make feelie hearts for our community and they are available at Hospice at no charge. If you or someone you know could use a feelie heart, please pop in to Hospice to get one. We also have kits available to make feelie hearts.



Lean Into It

By Anthony Carter



Since these words were written - back when I was the counsellor at Hospice - I have had many opportunities to choose between running from difficulties and turning to face them. The losses I have had and the challenges I face when conflict arises have provided me with plenty of practice over the years.

As I reflect on this, I realize that although the thoughts in this article were intended to help the bereaved navigate their grief, they have taken up residency in my life, giving me courage to embrace change, and when fear comes calling, invite it in for a cup of tea.

Leaning into it is a concept we have taken to heart at Hospice. It is such a helpful approach in places that hold great fear and discomfort for us, like the pain of grief or the fear of dying. This idea refers to moving toward the source of our pain rather than away from it.

We may find it very hard to lean into it sometimes; we may feel like running away from things. But running, as tempting as that may be, can leave us even weaker and more vulnerable.

For instance if we have an encounter with an aggressive dog, our instinct may be to run. But instead, we are called upon to lean into the situation by standing our ground.

The same is true of fear or anxiety, sadness or despair, guilt or anger, loneliness or helplessness - in other words, our grief. We can either run from these feelings and have them snapping at our heels or we can turn and stand our ground and become familiar with them.

The path to fearlessness isn't in giving our fear the slip somehow, but in really getting to know our fear. In the same way, the path to wholeness lies in getting to know our brokenness.

As we bring our focus to bear on these difficult thoughts and feelings, and as we call them by name, the power they hold over us begins to falter. And in the face of our courage they begin to resolve.

Leaning into it is a metaphor for being willing to directly experience whatever is arising for us in the present moment. It is like saying 'yes' to whatever life brings our way instead of looking for a means of escape.

Sadly, this philosophy is not well supported in our culture; quite the opposite.

There are many escape routes being modelled for us out there, from alcoholism to workaholism, that merely lead us deeper into the quagmire.

In the face of fear or discomfort we can become real masters at disguise. But by masking our symptoms, suppressing our feelings, and hiding our thoughts, we cut ourselves off from the very healing we need.

Author and neurologist Robert Scaer says "We're a frozen culture. Our problem is that we keep our fears, anxieties, and sadness bottled up inside us: we don't throw ourselves on the coffin of our loved one, or wail and tear our clothes, or really do anything to discharge our losses. So they stay in our unconscious and our bodies."

At Hospice, we encourage our clients to lean into it as we help them turn to face their difficulties.

We encourage our volunteers to lean into it by being self-aware as they offer service to others.

And we all lean into our work by striving to keep our minds and hearts open.

"...the path to our wholeness lies in getting to know our brokenness."

The Gift of Sorrow

By Cathy Routledge

I wrote this as Hospice Yukon's Executive Director in the fall of 2006, following the loss of someone very dear to me. It was a personal story, seated within the framework of my Hospice job. Revisiting it now I am retired; a bit older, wiser and having navigated a few more losses, I can say it still captures the way sorrow visits me and the lessons it has brought.

Grieving is a skill; a life skill or perhaps more correctly, a living skill, and it can be taught and learned. Hospice Yukon provides a variety of effective and accessible ways to understand, heal and grow in times of great sorrow; please know they are available to you.

Life promises we will know heartache and loss. Whether the loss is the death of someone we love, the ending of a relationship, a dream, an innocence, or an era of our lives, it is our universal human experience and it will come to us all.

We must choose what to bring forward with us from the experience into the new lives we have been presented with – whether they are the lives we want or not. I have heard it described as the ‘ultimate downsizing’ - you are moving from a big house to a small apartment - what are you going to bring with you?

At first glance, the *gift of sorrow* seems to be a contradiction in terms, if not an outright affront to the paralyzing heartache of grief. I honestly cannot say where I first read or heard the term, but it has found a home in my vocabulary and fits well with my nature.

One of my character traits equally beloved and bemoaned by people who love me is my seemingly eternal optimism;

my unshakeable knowing that life is good. As I have navigated through my own losses, one of the most difficult aspects has been the temporary misplacing of that bit of my essential nature, the loss of my faith in the goodness of life. It is as though I have mislaid some of my own self - like car keys gone astray, somewhere in my home. It compounds the loss I am mourning and as I thrash noisily around my grief, trying to figure out just what has happened to me, I travel further from who I know I am, anxious to get away from my own broken heart.

But of course, there is simply nowhere to run from yourself. The way through grief must be felt with the heart, not thought with the head - I know this - I should know this - I do Hospice work! But I seem to do it every time - whether the loss is big or not so big, my response is pretty much the same.

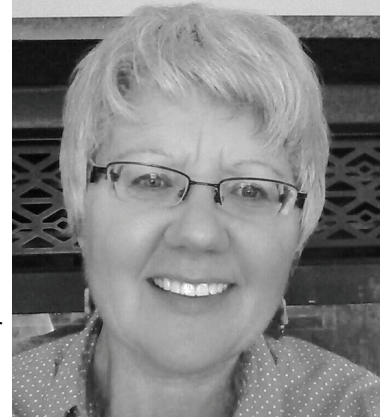
What I am slowly learning is to run only for a little ways and then try to sit quietly and hold

grief on my lap, waiting for it to turn into the gift of sorrow.

Given I am more impatient than most people, the waiting can seem as difficult as the grief. Sometimes, it takes only a short time, sometimes a long time and much hard work, but as I am able to find moments of sweetness mixed in with the sadness, I also recover more of my misplaced self.

This is always a relief, to know I am still me, undeniably altered by my loss, but still essentially me. And what I am discovering is that like love, loss adds to me, making me more than I was before. A little more compassionate, a little more understanding, a little more accepting and I hope, a little kinder.

This is the gift of my sorrow. Yours will come bearing it's own gifts – as individual as your fingerprints. Gifts that you need in your life and gifts that will help you heal, if you let them.



“There is simply nowhere to run from yourself.

The way through grief must be felt with the heart, not thought with the head.”

Holding Each Other

By Christine Klaassen-St.Pierre



Teacher Chris McNeill with students at FH Collins High School.

"We learn early on in our school that tears are not a sign of falling apart, they are a sign of strength and coping."

It is never easy to lose someone you care deeply for, but we had no way of preparing ourselves for the scope of sorrow felt by our school community when beloved

teacher, Chris McNeill, passed away this winter.

How could we create space for the emotion of not only our 650 students and their families, but also for those he taught in his twenty years of teaching here? How do you help hundreds of people deal with this loss?

People come together and hold each other - physically and emotionally - at a time like this. All you have to do is let it happen. Despite the fact that extra counsellors were available to help, we found that starting with our own counsellors and staff was the best way to help, even though—in fact, *because*—we were grieving ourselves. By allowing the students to see our tears, our sadness, our laughter at the memories, we gave them permission to do the same.

People kept asking me if I was going to be able to 'hold it together' to emcee his Celebration of Life. I thought to myself: why would I hold it

together? We learn early on in our school that tears are not a sign of falling apart, they are a sign of strength and coping.

On the day we heard of his passing we created a space for people to go to and posters on which to write what they loved about him. Impromptu shrines popped up in special spots in the school and we let it happen. We kept the flow of the routine going because we know that grief comes in waves, and after a wave it can be nice to have some 'normal' to step back into.

It was helpful to have clear communication with the family to know their wishes. This allowed us to do what students wanted to do to remember Mr. McNeill and show their condolences while respecting the family's needs.

As we planned things for students we realized that we needed to include parents and past graduates as well. We made his classroom available for people to visit on the day of his passing and also at his Celebration of Life.

One thing we noticed is that people really want to GIVE. Give of their time, their money, and their support. They wanted to help in any way they could. We collected donations for the Cancer Society and for Bikes for Annie: a fund created so his daughter would always have a bike as she grew up.

People also really want to DO. They wanted to *do something* while thinking and talking about him. So, we sewed feelie hearts for his daughter and her class, and for ourselves. The students found ways of telling his family what they loved about him through their own technologies. One student spent countless hours editing a short video honouring him. A student who had lost her own father made a quilt for Mr. McNeill's daughter.

Feeling powerless against the loss we also needed to help in small ways; putting up chairs for the Celebration of Life, making food to share after, greeting people as they enter, writing, singing, dancing for the Celebration.

We also need to keep remembering and honouring, now that the immediate loss has passed. Every month we pay homage to him in small ways in school life.

This spring, students will be remembering how Mr. McNeill always saw the good and shared it. Pick up one of our 'You Make A Difference' bracelets at the front office of FH Collins and tell someone how they make a difference in your life when you give it to them. They will wear it and feel good about themselves whenever they look at it. Then one day, they will take it off and pay it forward to someone else.

The Poncho Project

By Jill Murdoch

On December 21st 2005, my family lost an amazing, wonderful girl, just 15 years old.

It was unexpected, a hidden heart problem and in one very hard and horrible evening this beautiful girl was taken from her life, her family, her friends, her guinea pig, her future.

It was Christmastime and the night she died I recall stepping outside the hospital, our family going home without her and for some reason there was no snow on the ground. It hadn't snowed that much and what had fallen, melted.

I couldn't feel anything except numbness. I don't usually welcome the cold but wished I could feel it then.

The next day, the cold set in. We gathered at Tamara's house where my brother, a 6-foot-2 strong and powerful man, sat amongst friends and family in shock and sadness at the loss of his daughter.

People came to the door to give him hugs, to console him, but it was he who consoled them. He greeted them at the door, opening his big strong arms and taking them in.

The thought of a poncho came to mind as I wondered what I could do to add warmth to our world. I went shopping and could find nothing.

After these early days and weeks passed and we

continued to step one foot in front of the other, I took up knitting. It became my therapy.

I asked my brother who Tamara's closest friends were - she'd had many who had been connected with her during her life in a special way.

That year I knitted 36 ponchos in different colors.

When I had completed the ponchos I then knit squares with the leftovers and created a quilt with all the colors that represented the many wonderful people who'd made their mark on Tamara's life and ours too. This quilt went to Tamara's parents.

A few days before the first anniversary of Tamara's passing I shared this project with my brother and his family. I shared with them my intention and asked my brother to deliver them.

He did so along with a note from our family asking that they wear it knowing we are all connected and affected by this loss. We also told each friend that we are so grateful for the part they played in Tamara's life.

The next day, we had an open house and it warmed my heart to see so many people walk in to my brother's house with ponchos warming them, my brother still greeting them with open arms at his door.

The activity of creating and using my hands provided me with a way to walk through that very difficult year. The knitting needles, I guess you could say, were my crutches.

After I assembled the quilt for Tamara's parents and my brother delivered the ponchos I laid the knitting needles down. I had to learn to walk through my days without them.

It was still hard and my heart was still very heavy, but the transition was a little more bearable, and I hope and believe that these gifts made a difference in others' lives - helping them to stay warm on those cold days, remembering my brothers' arms around them in gratitude and love and shared loss.

"At the deepest level, the creative process and the healing process arise from a single source."

Rachel Naomi Remen



Volunteer Jill Murdoch with a few of the 36 ponchos she knit after the death of her niece, Tamara.

Healing with Gratitude *by Anne Macaire*

When we experience pain, either physical or emotional, we tend to contract. Think of stubbing your toe and how your body tightens up and pulls into itself, or how your face draws in when you feel sad, fearful or angry. Charles Darwin actually called the facial muscles that contract with these difficult emotions the 'grief muscles'. This tendency to contract around pain, however, actually causes us more pain.

Stephen Levine, who has supported the dying and grieving for most of his life, offers guided exercises for working with pain by creating space in and around it. This spaciousness is the opposite of contraction. Finding ways to

open up the contraction, to feel a greater sense of expansion, creates the space for healing to occur.

When I see people who are grieving, their bodies are usually tense and their minds are spinning tightly in relentless thoughts of pain that give no rest.

One way to loosen the tightness is to find some comfort: a walk in nature, a warm bath, treating ourselves with more kindness. Feeling a sense of gratitude also offers a way to open beyond the contraction of our grief.

Several years ago, I was at the dentist, practicing my usual relaxation routine of paying attention to my breath and unclenching my fists - over and over. Then I happened to remember all that was being offered to me: a skilled dentist who was completely focused on my well-being, a comfortable, friendly environment, even the precision drill that was working on my tooth, and I began to feel grateful.

I found the more grateful I felt, the more relaxed I became. I realized that I couldn't feel grateful and be contracted at the same time. Gratitude opens us up. It expands us and gives us a space to rest in. For the first time ever, I became completely relaxed in the dentist chair.

When we are in the midst of grief and despair, to look for things to be grateful for may seem trivial or irrelevant. But we don't have to feel grateful for everything that's happened, and gratitude helps us to see the whole of life. It gives us a bigger context within which we can experience all of our emotions.

In our darkest times we can be hard put to find something to be grateful for. This is when we can turn to some of the simplest things in our life. Probably most people reading this have a bed to sleep in; there are millions in the world who do not. My own bed is a great source of gratitude for me. A car that starts, clean water to drink, our own breath; the list is endless.

We have only to look as far as a warm cup of tea and our next meal to find a place for our gratitude to land. Each time we feel gratitude it expands our sense of self and nourishes our wellbeing.

Gratitude is so profound that it can be a life preserver when the seas get rough. But the time to begin to cultivate this simple practice is not when we need cheering up or when life has suddenly taken a downward spin. It is right now and every day.



Supporting Others in Crisis—The Ring Theory By Susan Silk and Barry Goldman

When Susan had breast cancer, we heard a lot of lame remarks, but our favorite came from one of Susan's colleagues. She wanted to visit Susan after the surgery, but Susan didn't feel like having visitors, and she said so. Her colleague's response? "This isn't just about you." "It's not?" Susan wondered. "My breast cancer is not about me? It's about you?"

The same theme came up again when our friend Katie had a brain aneurysm. A friend came and saw her and then stepped into the hall with Katie's husband, Pat. "I wasn't prepared for this," she told him. "I don't know if I can handle it."

This woman loves Katie, and she said what she did because the sight of Katie in this condition moved her so deeply. But it was the wrong thing to say. And it was wrong in the same way Susan's colleague's remark was wrong.

Susan has since developed a simple technique to help people avoid this mistake. It works for all kinds of crises. She calls it the Ring Theory.

Draw a circle. This is the center ring. In it, put the name of the person at the center of the trauma. Now draw a circle around the first one. In that ring put the name of the person next closest to the trauma. Repeat this as many times as you need to. Parents and children before more distant relatives. Intimate friends in

smaller rings, less intimate friends in larger ones. When you are done you have a Kvetching Order.

Here are the rules. The person in the center ring can say anything they want to anyone. They can kvetch and complain and curse the heavens and say, "Life is unfair" and "Why me?" That's the payoff for being in the center ring.

Everyone else can say those things too, but only to people in larger rings.

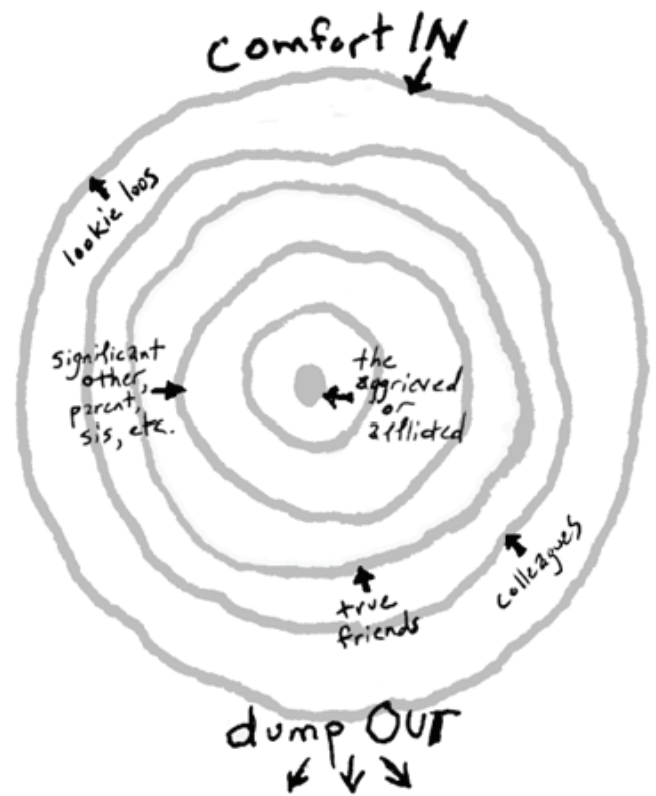
When you are talking to a person in a ring smaller than yours, the goal is to help. Listening is often more helpful than talking. But if you're going to open your mouth, ask yourself if what you are about to say is likely to provide comfort and support. If it isn't, don't say it. Don't, for example, give advice.

People who are suffering from trauma don't need advice. They need comfort and support. So say, "I'm sorry" or "This must really be hard for you". Don't say, "You should hear what happened to me" or "Here's what I would do if I were you." And don't say, "This is really bringing me down."

If you want to scream or cry, or tell someone how shocked you are, that's fine. It's a perfectly normal response. Just do it to someone in a bigger ring.

Comfort IN, dump OUT.

Complaining to someone in a smaller ring than yours doesn't do either of you any good. On the other hand, supporting the caregiver may be the best thing you can do for the person.



Most of us know this. Almost nobody would complain to a patient about how rotten she looks. Almost no one would say that looking at her makes them think of the fragility of life and their own closeness to death. In other words, we know enough not to dump into the center ring. Ring Theory merely expands that intuition and makes it more concrete: Don't just avoid dumping into the center ring, avoid dumping into any ring smaller than your own.

Remember, you can say whatever you want if you just wait until you're talking to someone in a larger ring than yours.

And don't worry. You'll get your turn in the center ring. You can count on that.

"When people are talking, there's no need to do anything but receive them. Just take them in. Listen to what they're saying. Care about it."

Rachel Naomi Remen

Coming to Hospice

By Dr. Sally MacDonald



Dr. Sally MacDonald has recently joined Hospice Yukon's Board of Directors.

As I write this in the crisp calm of a winter night with the magic of the northern lights decorating the sky outside I quietly await a very premature birth.

Will the baby survive? Should the baby survive? How will mom process this complex situation? How can the family begin to absorb what might soon transpire?

How can one small ward in one small northern hospital contain such extremes of life's treasures and challenges? The pinnacle of joy and love at the moment of birth, and the numbing pain and disbelief when unexpected loss happens.

Years ago, some very special Whitehorse families who had lost a baby gave a great gift to our maternity ward.

They educated us about their grief and how we, as health professionals, could help more at the time of the loss.

They also, as part of their own recovery, made beautiful bereavement boxes for those families who would suffer a similar loss in the future.

Finally, they formed a Hospice group and provided wonderful information and support for grieving parents.

That was my introduction to some of the many roles Hospice could have in our community.

Since then, I have seen how Hospice has helped many grieving family members understand and validate their feelings during the tumultuous bereavement period.

I have witnessed the dedication of Hospice volunteers as

they have gently and lovingly supported many palliative patients on the ward. I have also come a long way in my own journey of understanding bereavement since those early days as a young doctor. My family, my patients, my friends and Hospice have taught me a great deal.

Tonight, the bereavement box needed to be opened. A beautiful tiny feather, a hand-made 'feelie heart', a baby hat, a footprint kit and other little jewels lay within. Some wonderful information on grieving put together by Hospice was part of this; information that I suspect may lie dormant for some time, but will be there when someone's box of emotions may also open.

Thank you Hospice.

Healing Touch in times of Grief



Grief is an all-encompassing experience that affects our whole being: our thoughts, our sleep, our appetite, and our ability to simply get through the day.

Many bereaved clients at Hospice have found that Healing Touch can bring some comfort and calm during this difficult time.

Healing Touch is an energy-based technique supporting a

person to heal the body, mind and soul. It complements standard medical care.

The goal is to restore harmony and balance in people, which promotes relaxation and gives them a sense of well-being.

When the relaxation response is evoked, the heart rate and blood pressure drop, the blood flow to the muscles decreases, and blood is sent to the skin and brain instead.

As a result, clients experience a feeling of comforting warmth and calm alertness, and also a clearing of the mind. People often describe feelings of peacefulness and well-being lasting long after the Healing Touch session is finished.

Hospice volunteers trained in Healing Touch offer sessions to people who are grieving, as well as people who are dying and their caregivers.

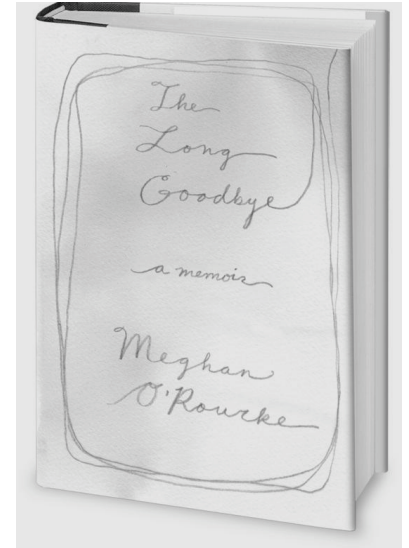
From the Hospice Library

Excerpt from **The Long Goodbye, by Meghan O'Rourke:**



"I had tried to find a metaphor for my loss in the weeks after my mother's death. Lately I have been thinking about a different metaphor: a metaphor for the self after loss. We have a word for the wife who's lost her husband - widow - but it's not a metaphor; it's an identity. And we don't really have a word for having lost a parent - except when we speak of children who have lost both parents as "orphaned." Walking to a party in Tribeca the other night - on one of those smoky, resonant autumn evenings - I caught a glimpse of my face in the window of

a hotel. I was thinking about how hard it was to say how much I missed my mother, yet how central the feeling was. It is heartsickness, like the sadness you feel after a breakup, but many times stronger and more desperate. I miss her: I want to talk to her, hear her voice, have a joke with her. I am willing for us to be "broken up" if she'll just have dinner with me once. And as I was walking I thought: *I will carry this wound forever.* It's not a question of getting over it or healing. No; it's a question of learning to live with this transformation. For the loss is transformative, in good ways and bad, a tangle of change that cannot be threaded into the usual narrative spools. It is too central for that. It's not an emergence from the cocoon, but a tree growing around an obstruction."



New books in stock...

Our little lending library at 409 Jarvis continues to grow each year. Hospice counsellor Anne Macaire researches and orders many new books thanks to a generous annual grant from Holland America.

We have over 500 titles, and some audio books, on a wide range of topics, including:

- Wellness - physical, emotional, spiritual, meditation
- Illness - cancer, AIDS, dementia

- End-of-life and palliative care
- All losses - spouse, child, parent, sibling, pet, traumatic death, suicide, and workplace loss
- Supporting teens and children
- Fiction, non-fiction and poetry

We also have some French books on loss and grief thanks to donations from L'Association Franco-Yukonnaise.

Our selection of CDs gets bigger every year and includes guided meditations, music, spiritual teachings and readings.

We also carry a number of excellent documentaries and films on DVD on death and dying.

The library is open weekdays from 11:30am to 3pm. Pop in and enjoy a quiet space while you browse the books and other resources at Hospice House.



Our next newsletter will be distributed electronically only. To ensure you are on our email list please get in touch...
667-7429
administrator@hospiceyukon.net





Programs and Services

Living with Loss - An Introduction to Healthy Grieving

A free, 2-hr public education session to help you better understand the grieving experience. Offered four times per year.

Counselling

One-on-one counselling support for those who are dying or grieving, and their loved ones

Grief Support Groups

These groups help grieving people find support and connection with others who are also experiencing loss. Groups such as the Walking Group and the Day of Quiet Retreat are offered several times per year.

Healing Touch

A relaxing energy therapy that supports holistic health. Sessions are available for people who are dying and their caregivers, people who are grieving, and health care professionals.

Vigil Support

Bedside support in the final week to days of life.

Professional Support

Support and resources for professionals and caregivers.

To inquire about dates and registration for any of these programs:

Tel. 867-667-7429 administrator@hospiceyukon.net

www.hospiceyukon.net

Please visit us online at www.hospiceyukon.net

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