



SAFE CROSSINGS
FOUNDATION



ANNUAL REPORT

2023^{EDITION}

Your Gifts Made a Huge Impact

Established in 1989, Safe Crossings Foundation (SCF) is dedicated to helping grieving children heal and thrive. By researching and funding leading-edge grief support programs, we provide resources to help kids safely navigate loss, rediscover joy, and emerge as emotionally healthy and resilient members of society.

Thanks to our generous donors, we are making a larger impact on the community every year!

Your donations make it possible to continue providing free support to grieving children and their families through programs tailored to their needs.

SAFE CROSSINGS PROGRAM HEALS IN SCHOOLS

As a social worker within the Puyallup School District, Jane Upshaw encounters students for many reasons. Some need extra help in the classroom, while others need support in their extracurricular activities. However, Jane's encounters increasingly involve students who are grappling with the death of a caregiver, family member, or close friend. This is a profound experience for kids who are simultaneously navigating the ordinary challenges of growing up.

Before joining the school district, Jane was a hospice social worker. She spent her days sitting with patients, hearing their stories, and supporting families through the anticipatory grief that often accompanies terminal illness. In her current role, Jane is acutely aware of the overwhelming need for grief support.

In 2023, Jane attended SCF's Annual Northwest Conference on Childhood Grief to learn more about the impact of death on children and how best to support families through the grieving process. There she participated in a session presented by Safe Crossings Program (SCP) counselors, Makenzie and Courtney, entitled "Grief Support Groups and Resources for Schools" which included a review of SCP's school grief group curriculum and a demonstration of the accompanying activity kit.

The curriculum, a six-week course with one meeting per week, caters to different school-age groups, ensuring that students receive age-appropriate grief support. The kits, filled with printed materials, coloring utensils, grief books, craft supplies, and comfort items, are a symbol of hope for grieving students.



Over the course of the 90-minute session, Jane realized that the tools being offered were desperately needed in her district. Determined to make a difference, Jane made it her personal mission to bring children's grief support to her community. "We have to take this back to our schools!"

With the help of Safe Crossings Foundation, Jane made good on her commitment and obtained a grief kit, which is more than just curriculum and materials. It has been a catalyst for building community, fostering relationships between students and counselors, and teaching compassion and empathy.

Kids who have experienced death found solace in the community the school grief groups provided. "I'm so sad this is over," students shared after the six-week program concluded. As Jane looked out over the students she served, she knew that the curriculum and kits were more than just tools—the grief kits are beacons of light, guiding her students toward healing and community.



Safe Crossings Program served **777** youth between the ages of 6-18 through in-home and virtual individual counseling sessions, phone and email consultations, and virtual holiday events. Counselors also supported another **232** students and faculty through school crisis response and trainings.

A PLACE FOR GRIEF AT CAMP ERIN

“THERE ARE SPACES WHERE MY SON CAN BE A KID, AND SPACES WHERE HE IS GRIEVING. CAMP ERIN IS THE FIRST PLACE FOR HIM TO BE A GRIEVING KID.” - RONAN’S MOM

In August 2019, Ronan and his mom, Verhanika, faced one of life’s toughest challenges. Andy, Ronan’s dad, was placed on hospice care after being diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer and died the following October. With heavy hearts, Verhanika and Ronan, just three years old at the time, found themselves navigating the uncharted waters of grief.



As a child, Verhanika had learned that her grandmother died when her mom was just 17 years old and that her mom grieved her loss alone. Determined to spare Ronan from the same pain her mother felt, Verhanika sought guidance from the hospice team that worked closely with the family throughout Andy’s illness.

The hospice team provided wrap-around care for Verhanika, Ronan and Andy. They were given comfort and love, and directed to grief support providers that specialized in childhood bereavement support. It was here that they first learned of an overnight, summer grief camp for kids and teens, known as Camp Erin.

Initially, Verhanika envisioned a typical grief group for kids, simply a place for Ronan to process his emotions. After speaking to Alex, a Camp Erin and Safe Crossings Program counselor, she learned that Camp Erin is just like any other summer camp with fun activities, but with the additional grief-related exercises to help participants connect with one another and begin their healing.

Upon pick-up after the camp weekend concluded, Verhanika saw an incredible transformation in Ronan. After attending camp at the age of 6, he could articulate his feelings and advocate for his own needs. “Now, I know how to talk about my grief.”

Camp Erin not only provided a safe haven for Ronan, it also empowered Verhanika as a parent. Armed with newfound knowledge about childhood grief, she became an advocate for her son to ensure his needs are met in the classroom and in his other activities. Through the trauma-informed care that Camp Erin counselors provided, Ronan was able to flourish in an environment where his pain was understood, and his grief supported.



As Verhanika reflected on their experience, she marveled at the profound impact Camp Erin had on their lives. It isn’t just a camp; it is a lifeline. They found the courage to embrace their grief journey, knowing that they were never alone. Verhanika is grateful for the resilience they have discovered together. In the depths of grief, they have found strength, compassion, and the unwavering belief that healing is possible.

SAFE CROSSINGS FOUNDATION GRANTEE PARTNERS

MORE THAN 4,482 KIDS WERE SERVED IN 2023

In addition, Safe Crossings Foundation grantees provided over 40,000 hours of grief support to kids and their families in Washington. Another 9,000 kids were served by professionals who attended our Northwest Conference on Childhood Grief.



Crisis Connections provided support for 92 youth after a death by suicide.



Diaspora Family Healing Network

DFHN served 125 youth through their youth grief support basketball clinic.



Youth Eastside Services supported 111 youth through evidence-based and age-appropriate counseling.



Griever's Library opened three new community grief libraries, expanded the online grief book database, and provided more than 700 books to youth in the Puget Sound.



THE HEALING CENTER
a grief support community
adults • children • families

The Healing Center provided group and individual support for 96 children and their families.



Bridges Center for Grieving Children served 408 youth through peer group support.



Seattle Children's
HOSPITAL • RESEARCH • FOUNDATION

Seattle Children's Journey Program served 311 youth through their family counseling programs, providing services in English and Spanish.



eluna

Eluna and Art With Heart teamed up again in 2023 to provide Draw it Out books to over 2,200 kids nationally.



Wild Grief provided peer support for more than 130 youth and families by connecting them to nature.

WHERE YOUR DONATIONS GO

Safe Crossings Foundation knows it's important for you to understand the impact your donations are having on the lives of grieving children in your community. Here are just a few examples of what we are able to fund with your gifts.

\$350

Curriculum and kit for school grief group

\$500

Care package for three families impacted by suicide

\$750

Send three counselors to the Northwest Conference on Childhood Grief

\$1,000

Safe Crossings Program translation services for a family

\$3,000

Six-week grief support group for bilingual families

\$5,000

Year-long grief support for five children

\$7,500

Sponsors Camp Erin - King County for 10 campers



HEALING WITHIN COMMUNITY

A JOURNEY THROUGH NATURE'S HEALING TOUCH

Soon after its creation in 1989, Safe Crossings Foundation began funding Safe Crossings Program at Providence Hospice of Seattle. Since 2015, SCF has extended its support to other children's grief programs throughout Washington. Among our current grantee partners, Seattle Children's Journey Program and Wild Grief stand as pivotal programs in SCF's network. This collaborative network strives to bridge gaps in services, particularly for underserved communities that lack access to essential grief resources.

Seattle Children's Journey Program offers vital grief and bereavement support to siblings and family members navigating the death of a child. Their dedicated counselors facilitate sessions aimed at supporting families in managing the complexities of death, loss, and the grieving journey. Wild Grief specializes in immersive nature-based programs tailored for kids and families coping with the death of a loved one. Integrating peer-based support with the therapeutic power of nature, they offer a unique avenue for healing.



In 2023, the Journey Program and Wild Grief joined forces to introduce an alternative approach to grief support for Spanish-speaking families. Together, they developed guided outdoor programming that specifically caters to the Journey Program's Spanish-speaking participants. This year, two hikes were hosted for families.

To kickstart the initiative, counselors from the Journey Program and guides from Wild Grief organized a warm, welcoming lunch for families. This gathering provided an opportunity for grieving families to meet other participants and program facilitators, while also receiving insights into their upcoming outdoor experiences. Adding a touch of cultural celebration, everyone shared tamales, symbolizing the richness of the participants' heritage.

During the hikes, families were encouraged to craft 'ofrendas' (offerings) using natural materials such as branches, flowers, and rocks found along the trail. These heartfelt tributes served as expressions of love and remembrance for their departed loved ones.



The collaborative and culturally tailored efforts between these two programs created a distinctive form of support, enabling participants to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their grief. Reflecting on the profound impact of this innovative programming, a counselor commented, "the vastness of nature is neutral, it doesn't judge.... It just is. And grief just is, too."



LISTENING AND LEARNING FROM OUR YOUTH STAKEHOLDERS

Safe Crossings Foundation takes a big-picture approach to addressing community grief support needs and resources. As a leader in funding services that help grieving children heal, we partner with the youth we serve. In 2021, two high-school brothers, Kyle and Connor, joined forces with Safe Crossings Foundation to begin the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) for teens who have experienced a death in their family. Following in their footsteps in 2022, two young women, Taylor and Franqui, created the Young Professionals Advisory Council (YPAC) for young adults.

In February 2023, members of both councils organized the inaugural, "Community Fair: Giving Love and Guiding Grief." This gathering provided a platform for youth to share their stories of grief with peers, community members, and Seattle Leaders Mayor Bruce Harrell and First Lady Joanne Harrell. That day, their goal to raise awareness about childhood grief and amplify the message that grief support is critical was achieved.

Throughout the year, the councils grew their membership and expanded their reach to youth and their families following the death of a loved one. They maintain an ongoing partnership with SCF staff, actively contributing to our event planning, offering innovative solutions to bridge gaps in areas that lack support, and combat the stigma associated with grief.

northwest conference ON CHILDHOOD GRIEF

In 2023, Safe Crossings Foundation presented the ninth annual Northwest Conference on Childhood Grief. More than 80 professionals from across five states participated in our hybrid, two-day conference, engaging with grief support experts located across the United States. Ten facilitators and presenters provided continuing education on various topics, including traumatic loss, delivering grief support in educational settings, the somatic effects of grief, and supporting marginalized communities.

"I truly don't have the right words - this was such a good conference to be a part of. I enjoyed the people and presenters. The information made me think of my implementation and truly think deeper into how I go into each session with my students a little more thoughtfully. I took so much good information from this conference and a little bit of personal healing as well."

—School Behavioral Health Assistant



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