

Hospice of the Piedmont | CVC Code 03726 | Independent/Unaffiliated Charity
Journeys Camp Allows Children to Heal in Safe Space

Not many children know what it feels like to lose a parent. When Anna Sturges' father Michael died, she was nine years old. She recalls feeling like she was the only person who'd experienced that kind of loss, to know how lonely and sad it felt to not have a dad. That was three years ago, and in that time, the fresh, sharp pain of loss had subsided but Anna still had periods of sadness. "I felt like I didn't have anyone to talk to," Anna said. While her two older brothers and mother provided some comfort, Anna still felt isolated by the experience outside of her family connections.



Anna's mother Kathleen—also processing the loss of her husband of 21 years—recalled working with HOP's Art Therapists during Michael's decline. She said Anna had some productive art therapy sessions at their home and when, in the spring of 2014, Anna's feelings of sadness became overwhelming, Kathleen learned about the Journeys day camps, hosted by HOP in Charlottesville twice a year.

The Journeys family day camp was created specifically for families and children who've been affected by the death of a loved one. Thanks to generous support from the community, the all-day camp brings together children and teens ages 5-18, along with their parents or guardians, for activities and creative expression in a group setting. The activities, designed by HOP's team of Certified Art Therapists, encourage bonding and communication, and they promote healing while memorializing the lives of loved ones lost. Best of all, there is no fee for the Journeys camp and any child or teen in the community who has lost a loved one may attend.

Attending the camp in spring 2014 was a turning point for Anna. She recalled the moment that she arrived and looked out at the more than 50 other children—her peers, who had all experienced a loss, just like her. "I was happy to find that I wasn't alone," she said. During the course of the day, Anna connected with another young girl who had lost her mother. Anna said she felt a special connection over their shared loss, and they have stayed in contact since the camp ended. Besides connecting with others at camp, she had a lot of fun! She enjoyed musical and artistic activities, and brought home one special art project—a flower pot she painted in honor of her father. She plans to plant something in the pot to remind her of her father.

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Since attending the Journeys camp, Anna said she feels like a weight has been lifted, one that she was previously unable to lift by herself. "The camp helped me pull that weight away," she said. "And I knew that I wasn't the only one to feel this way and go through this. I didn't feel alone anymore."

Journeys is part of Hospice of the Piedmont's Center for Children and helps to ensure that children, like Anna, have the opportunity to heal by connecting with others over their shared loss. The Journeys camp is just one program under the Center for Children—all of which are provided at no cost to any member of the community who is dealing with the loss of a loved one. Learn more at www.hopva.org or by calling 434-817-6900