



THE AUSTIN CENTER FOR  
**Grief&Loss**  
*Hope › Healing › Transformation*

Newsletter

Summer 2019

## A Message from our Executive Director

Paula D'Arcy writes in her latest book, *Winter of The Heart*, "Grief is the heart's response to loss. Our mind can grasp details rapidly, but the heart moves at a different pace and needs time to absorb what is happening."

I am often asked, why do people come to The Austin Center for Grief & Loss as opposed to a private therapist in the community. My response is always the same, "because we specialize in grief and loss." Grief moves at its own pace, and everyone's grief journey is different. Grief is not a mental health diagnosis but rather our human homeostatic reaction to loss. Hence Paula's words: "the heart moves at a different pace." Grief is complicated for many who access our services – meaning the intensity is so great that adapting to their loss is confusing and overwhelming. Our therapists are uniquely trained in providing support and accompanying someone on their grief journey. Together, they work towards healing and transformation.

We often host events like art shows and ice cream socials that seemingly have nothing to do with grief. We do so for the primary purpose of introducing community members to the Center and letting them know about our organization. Specifically, we want to convey that we are a specialized, reliable, and safe resource in the hopes that they will recommend The Austin Center for Grief & Loss to a grieving person who might greatly benefit from accessing our services. We also want anyone who needs grief counseling to receive services regardless of their ability to afford them. For this reason, we remain grateful to the individual donors and private foundations that financially make our important work possible. We are also very appreciative of our team of staff, therapists, and volunteers who remain dedicated to serving our clients and fulfilling our mission.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

## **New York Life Foundation Grief Reach \$50,000 Grant Awarded**

The Austin Center for Grief & Loss was awarded a \$50,000 Grief Reach grant focusing on community expansion from the New York Life Foundation. With this financial support, Austin Grief will be able to expand its school-based program in Hays and Travis counties with the goal of serving 480 students over the next two years. By the spring semester of 2021, we expect to have more than doubled the number of schools that we currently serve. The school-based program provides local students with a safe environment to discuss and normalize their loss and the tools needed to regulate their emotions.



**NEW YORK LIFE  
FOUNDATION**

The New York Life Foundation created the Grief Reach program to help providers overcome barriers to bringing grief support services to youth not served by existing bereavement programs. More than 200 Grief Reach grants totaling over \$8 million have been awarded since the program's inception in 2011. The New York Life Foundation has been one of the leading funders of the childhood bereavement field, investing more than \$40 million to date in support of grieving children and their families.

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## **The Burdine Johnson Foundation Grant Awarded**

Motivated by the desire to enhance the quality of life for those in Hays County and Central Texas, The Burdine Johnson Foundation has awarded a \$15,000 grant in support of the school-based services Austin Grief offers in Hays Consolidated ISD.

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## **Travis County Medical Alliance Grant Awarded**

The mission of the Travis County Medical Alliance Foundation is to assist the Travis County community with health related needs and to foster social networks for the families of medicine. Austin Grief was awarded a \$5,000 grant in support of our work with grief groups in Travis County schools.



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## Awarded the Walmart Community Grant

The Walmart Community Grants Team awarded Austin Grief a \$1,000 grant. Mrs. Helen Walton used to say "It's not what you gather, but what you scatter that tells what kind of life you have lived."

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## Holders of Hope Entertainment BettySoo

We are thrilled to announce BettySoo as the musical entertainment for Holders of Hope, October 17, 2019 at The Umlauf Sculpture Garden. "BettySoo may well have the most gorgeous voice in Texas at the moment, if not in all contemporary folk." -- Acoustic Guitar Magazine

A promotional poster for BettySoo's performance at Holders of Hope. The background is a photograph of BettySoo sitting in a field of tall grass and wildflowers, wearing a white lace dress. On the left, there is a dark grey vertical bar containing white text. The text reads: "BETTYSOO MAY WELL HAVE THE MOST GORGEOUS VOICE IN TEXAS AT THE MOMENT, IF NOT IN ALL CONTEMPORARY FOLK. Its purity and strength can be downright devastating when shined through the prism of songs from her deeply moving *When We're Gone*. The rest of her catalog is just as rich – and varied, with *Little Tiny Secrets* flashing a sense of humor as wicked as the true grit that characterized Gurf Morlix-produced *Heat Sin Water Skin*. ~ Acoustic Guitar Magazine". Below this, in a light green rounded rectangle, is the text "OCTOBER 17, 2019", "HOLDERS OF HOPE", and "Umlauf Sculpture Garden". At the bottom of the poster, the name "BettySoo" is written in a large, elegant, gold-colored script font. In the bottom right corner of the photo, there is small text that says "photo by Valerie Fremin".

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Camp Red Bird**



## Session 2: August 5th - 9th

The Austin Center for Grief & Loss is hosting the only camp of its kind in Austin. Camp Red Bird is a bereavement summer day camp for children ages 6-12 that have experienced the death of a parent, sibling, or primary caregiver. Camp Red Bird engages children in therapeutic activities that incorporate art, crafts, nature-based experiences, yoga, and movement to help process feelings of grief. Children who attend camp learn to develop healthy coping skills in a safe and supportive environment.

### **Yoga for Grief & Loss**

5 week series

Fridays, August 23rd - September 20th

10:00 - 11:15 am

It's not only the mind that needs to grieve, it's the body as well. Yoga integrates body, mind, and spirit. This gentle, restorative, and trauma-informed yoga class offers the space for letting go of tension in the body, and in turn, creating greater ease within the mind. Feel a sense of community without having to speak a word, feel physically and emotionally supported, gain a sense of control, peace and acceptance in the aftermath of loss. No prior yoga experience is necessary to participate in this group. Scholarships available.

### **David Borden Art Exhibit**

#### **Featuring Ruby Borden and The Dude Choir**

Friday, September 13th

5:00 - 7:00 pm

Join us for our fall art opening featuring the father-daughter work of David and Ruby Borden. David will read from his graphic novel, *And Yet We Rise*--an autobiographical work in which he describes the hidden world of parenting a medically fragile child. This graphic novel explores the beauty and heartbreak with frankness and humanity.

David Borden is an award-winning artist, writer, and educator. He specializes in painting portraits and landscapes, but he also enjoys drawing, painting with ink, and making block prints. He is a member of the Dude Choir which will also perform during the show.

Ruby Borden is also an accomplished artist. She attends McCallum High School, and her specialty is drawing whimsical, vibrant portraits with ink, watercolor, and gouache. Lately, she has spent more time using acrylic on canvas. Her web comics are charming and full of life.

### **Comics and Cartooning**

4 week series

Thursdays, September 26th - October 17th

In this series, David Borden will instruct on cartoon and comic techniques, the medium he used to help process the death of his daughter, Savannah. His first graphic novel, *And Yet We Rise*, was featured on Fox7 News. The story is about coping with the short, but profound life of his oldest daughter, who passed away just shy of her sixteenth birthday. She taught him to laugh loudly, face every day with courage, and dare to dream. Comics and Cartooning will offer community in a supportive environment, creativity and self expression, and refreshments. All skill levels welcome.

**To register for the above events and for more information on upcoming programs, please click the link below.**

[Austin Grief Events](#)

## SUPPORT GROUP SPOTLIGHT

### **Living On Support Group**

Austin Grief is offering a new support group. The Living On Support Group is intended for widows and widowers who are having difficulty recovering from the loss of a spouse after twelve to thirty months. It is not uncommon for widows and widowers to discover that they can feel stuck as time passes. They reach a point (often in the second year) in their grief, where they struggle to move back into a life that has meaning and purpose. Austin Grief has developed a new support group to better meet the needs of this special time. For more information please call 512.472.7878 or visit our support group page on our website.

### **Adult General Loss Support Group**

The Adult General Loss Support Group meet twice monthly and the group is held during the day. Members of this group have experienced the death loss of a parent, sibling, or another close relative or friend. This group is facilitated by two trained volunteers and supervised by a licensed clinician.

[Support Groups](#)

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

# National Alliance for Grieving Children



Becky Morales, LCSW, Clinical Director and Rachel Saffer, LCSW, Children's Program Manager, attended the National Alliance for Grieving Children (NAGC) Symposium. The NAGC Symposium is the longest running and most comprehensive Childhood Bereavement Symposium offered in the United States. The NAGC Symposium is an opportunity to share and connect with more than 400 children's grief support professionals from organizations throughout and outside the United States.

## APD Crime Victim Services

Becky Morales, LCSW and Paula Loring, LCSW-S, provided a training to the Austin Police Department Victim Services on the topic "Responding to Grief and Trauma in Crisis: Tending to Ourselves and Others".

## Travis County 126th Civil District Court

Becky Morales, LCSW, presented to the 126th Civil District Court on the topic of 'Compassion Fatigue and Secondary Trauma'. The training covered the distinction between trauma and grief reactions, how to navigate them, as well as how to understand, manage, and prevent compassion fatigue and secondary trauma for professionals working within the justice system.

## YOUR AUSTIN GRIEF COMMUNITY

### A Message from our Clinical Director

How is it possible that the first half of 2019 is done? The spring was a busy time at Austin Grief, and I'd like to highlight a few of our accomplishments. We expanded our volunteer base and had 10 individuals complete our robust 24-hour volunteer training at the end of April. Without our volunteer base, we simply could not reach the community in the way we do - many of our volunteers are in the role of peer support group facilitator, meaning they provide support to those on their grief journey attending one of our current thirteen support groups. And speaking of support groups, we will be expanding our service offerings later this summer to offer an

additional four groups! What a great opportunity we have at Austin Grief to grow in meeting the needs of our community – all of which could not happen without service of our amazing volunteers!

The spring also saw us wrap up another school year in providing eleven school groups at nine campuses within Austin ISD and Hays Consolidated ISD. Our ability to provide support to students at their respective schools would not be possible without our amazing programmatic partner, Communities In Schools of Central Texas. We look forward to the upcoming school year and the opportunity to continue being of service to the students of Central Texas.

In addition to wrapping up a great spring in terms of service, we have had a wonderful start to our summer in expanding our Austin Grief team. Regina Smith joined us in early June as our Volunteer/Event Coordinator, and she has already made a huge impact in a short time! This is the first time Austin Grief has had a dedicated Volunteer Coordinator and we are excited about our ability to now provide enhanced support to our volunteers.

I anticipate the second half of 2019 to be just as busy - with continued energy and planning around meeting the needs of those who need us the most. I have no doubts that the remainder of 2019 will be filled with success and accomplishments as we fulfill our mission.

Warm regards,  
Becky Morales, LCSW

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## **Love, Transformation and What is Possible**

### **A Wedding at Austin Grief**

This spring, The Austin Center for Grief & Loss hosted its first wedding in The Loewy Family Commons. Michael Embry and Nikki Lawing had both lost their spouses and began attending our bereaved partner and spouses' group on Monday nights. Nikki said that she remembers meeting



Michael at her first group back in December of 2017. Nikki didn't talk to him because her grief was so palpable that if she spoke, she would cry. By April of the following year, they discovered they both like art and books. They enjoyed talking at the meetings and grew closer to each other. Then Nikki moved back to Virginia with her 4



young children. They kept in touch with text messages, and when Michael visited family in Maryland they arranged to meet for lunch. They felt a definite spark, and a remote relationship evolved. After Nikki decided to return to Austin, they continued dating and attending support group. This past spring, they decided to marry and thought that The Loewy Family Commons was the perfect venue since that is where their support group meets. They announced their wedding plans to their group and less than two weeks later they married on Friday, May 31st with Pastor Russell Hartsfield officiating and good friends Janice and Lester Vanzura witnessing their marriage vows. We wish Michael and Nikki much joy and happiness in their new life together.

Pictured left to right: Lester and Janice Vanzura, Nikki and Michael, Pastor Russell Hartsfield.

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## **Welcome Group Coordinator and Therapist Lexi Losch, LPC-Intern**



Austin Grief is delighted to welcome Lexi Losch, LPC-Intern as a Support Group Coordinator and therapist. Lexi earned her Master's in Higher Education Administration from the University of Miami in 2006 and worked in higher education for several years before earning her Master's in Professional Counseling from Texas State University in 2018. Her experience working with students on their non-academic concerns led her to a career in counseling. Lexi uses Narrative

Therapy as a tool to help clients retell their stories that helps them find power and peace within it. Lexi enjoys spending time with her husband and three children.

Supervised by Lacey Fisher, LPC-S, RPT-S.

## **Welcome Bilingual Therapist Jocelyn Chamra-Barrera, LCSW**

Austin Grief welcomes Jocelyn Chamra-Barrera, LCSW as a bilingual therapist. She has been a practicing social worker in Austin since 2014. She has previous experience working with children,



adolescents, and families, having served as a social worker at a family resource center and the Travis County Child Advocacy Center. Jocelyn has focused her work in the areas of mental health, child abuse and neglect, intimate partner violence, and significant trauma. Jocelyn is trained in EMDR. She holds a Masters of Social Work from the Steve Hicks School of Social Work and a Bachelor of Arts from The

University of Texas at Austin. Jocelyn currently serves as the Bilingual Services and Kids Who Care Coordinator at The Christi Center. She is excited to join the team at The Austin Center for Grief & Loss.



## **Welcome Volunteer & Event Coordinator Regina Smith**



Austin Grief is happy to welcome Regina Smith to the team as our Volunteer and Event Coordinator. She is genuine, dedicated to our mission and focused on the care of our volunteers. Regina is a proud 5th generation Texan. She grew up in north Texas and moved to Austin after graduating from the University of Southern California. She worked for over a decade in operations and project management before pursuing her Masters of Social Work at Our

Lady of the Lake University. In her free time she enjoys long distance running, all things outdoors, spending time with her family and friends, and volunteering with hospice patients and families.

## **Welcome Board of Director Leo Ramirez**

The Austin Center for Grief & Loss is pleased to announce that Leo Ramirez has joined its board of directors. Leo is CEO and Co-Founder of Encast, a company that helps businesses enhance workplace culture and brand through social impact.

Leo's 24-year career has spanned executive management, business development, consulting, nonprofit management, technical support and engineering positions with Southwest Key Programs, Oracle, Sun Microsystems, Coremetrics, Trilogy and Apple.

Leo has extensive non-profit board experience including CASA of Travis County, iACT, HealthCode, The Mexic-Arte Museum, and The Mex-Net Alliance. Leo was a deacon, choir member and 2 & 3-year-old Sunday school teacher at First Presbyterian Church of Austin and has volunteered for many other non-profit organizations. Leo will join the Development Committee of Austin Grief's board of directors and is already making an impact with his energy, enthusiasm and ideas.

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## Volunteer Spotlight Samsung Austin Semiconductor



Samsung Austin Semiconductor is a big supporter of The Austin Center for Grief & Loss. In May, **Samsung Austin Semiconductor awarded the Center a \$5,000 grant** in support of our work with grieving children. Additionally, we are the regular beneficiary of volunteers from the Samsung Fab Engineering Diffusion/Implant team. They have provided deep cleanings, garden maintenance, and painted rooms on multiple occasions in the past year. At Christmas, they surprised us with boxes of toys, stuffed animals and blankets for us to give our kiddos. Thank you to this wonderful Central Texas employer for all you do for Austin Grief.

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## Volunteer Self-Care

Austin Grief thanks the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema for their generous donation to our Volunteer Program. Our volunteers will enjoy complimentary popcorn and drinks at their next cinematic experience! [The Alamo Drafthouse](https://www.alamodrafthouse.com/) offers all-inclusive private events for all groups and occasions. For more details and pricing, contact Alamo at [austin.rentals@drafthouse.com](mailto:austin.rentals@drafthouse.com) or (512) 861-7084.



We also thank The Rowing Dock for their generous donation of paddle boarding, kayaking, or canoeing on Lady Bird Lake . [The Rowing Dock](#) also offers fun specials and advanced ticket sale options for events like Bat Paddles and Fireworks Paddles via their monthly newsletter. Get in on the fun, sign-up up here: <https://www.rowingdock.com/newsletter/>.

The work of our volunteers is very rewarding; however, it may also be intense and heavy. We want to balance this with supporting their self-care and by bringing some lightness and fun to thank them for their service. If you have a donation that you think would bring inspiration, joy, relaxation, or fun to our volunteers, please contact Volunteer Coordinator, Regina Smith at [rsmith@austingrief.org](mailto:rsmith@austingrief.org).

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## Volunteer Opportunities

Austin Grief has a compassionate volunteer community. In gratitude we are making 2019, *The Year of the Volunteer*! If you would like to be a part of transforming lives after loss, please consider joining our volunteer community. There are numerous ways you can support hope, healing and transformation, including child care, event coordination, fundraising, gardening, and as a board committee member. For more information on volunteering please visit the [Get Involved](#) section of our website and contact Regina Smith at [rsmith@austingrief.org](mailto:rsmith@austingrief.org).

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## Holder of Hope Giving Circle

Please financially support The Austin Center for Grief & Loss and become a Holder of Hope Giving Circle member. Hope can be fleeting for those experiencing a loss - death, divorce, or other tragedy. A death often leaves people isolated and alone. By contributing a gift of \$10, \$25, \$50, or \$100 per month, you will become a Holder of Hope Giving Circle member. You will help sustain our important mission and work.

On behalf of our clients, staff, and board of directors, thank you for your support and for helping The Austin Center for Grief & Loss bring about transformation in the lives of our clients and making aspirations, ambitions, expectations and dreams possible again.

[Holder of Hope Giving Circle](#)

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## How can you support your



# Austin Grief Community?

**Referrals**, individuals can schedule an intake appointment by phone at: 512.472.7878 or [online](#) anytime. For consultations or trainings in the community please call 512.472.7878.

**Shop** and give at the same time! When you shop using [Amazon Smile](#), [Freytag's Austin Community Bloom's program](#) and even using your Randall's card!

**Spread the word** and let your community know why you support The Austin Center for Grief & Loss.

**Sponsor** Holders of Hope 2019. For more information visit our website, [Holders of Hope](#).

**Donate**, without your support, we could not continue to change lives providing hope, healing and transformation. To make a donation visit our [website](#) or click the link below.

**Holder of Hope Giving Circle**, by contributing a gift of \$10, \$25, \$50, or \$100 per month, you will become a [Holder of Hope Giving Circle](#) member and will help sustain the much-needed work of providing hope, healing, and transformation.

[DONATE TODAY](#)

[www.AustinGrief.org](http://www.AustinGrief.org)

2413 Greenlawn Pkwy., Austin, TX 78757

512.472.7878



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