COMMUNITY GRIEF SUPPORT

FINDING HOPE TOGETHER

Annual Impact Report 2022

Dear Community Grief Support Family:

As we begin a new year, I would like to take the time to thank all our Community Grief Support (CGS) Board and Staff members, Volunteers, and Financial Partners. I greatly appreciate everyone's efforts in contributing toward our continued success and sustainability.

2022 was a fantastic year for Community Grief Support – all three fundraising events – "Lift Your Spirits," "M+C Festival," and "Tree of Lights" were incredibly successful. I would like to say a special thank you to Bob Butler for his tenure as the 2022 Board Chair. He has dedicated many years to CGS in various roles and always gives 110 percent. Thank you, Bob!

Today – I am writing to you as the 2023 CGS Board Chair. I can tell you that I would have never guessed I would have this opportunity when I attended my first grief support meeting in January 2011. Just as a reference—I would not even speak for the first five meetings. But CGS Founder Dr. Trudy Thorpe was not having that. She knew I needed to tell my story of loss to people who got it. Even if it meant telling it over and over. I am so very grateful she continued to encourage me to participate in the group.

As we look forward in 2023, we have several new priorities. First of all, we are looking for a new facility. For 20+ years Dawson Baptist Church has graciously provided us free office space and now has need for it. In this post-COVID world, mental health is becoming more of a priority and to better meet the rising demand for our services, we will be hiring an additional, part-time counselor and/or outreach staff.

As we continue to service our communities this year—and in the years to come—we need only to remember our Community Grief Support mission statement: "To enhance the quality of life for the bereaved adults who face the challenge of rebuilding their lives without their loved ones."

I am looking forward to CGS serving and growing more in our community by walking out our mission to provide support for individuals grieving the loss of a loved one. Thank you again for all you do to make us a vital part of the community.

Peggy Ruth Hicks
2023 CGS Board Chair

"No one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear."
- C.S. Lewis

"I feel so blessed and am so grateful for CGS for giving me a new lease on life with meaning and purpose which nurtures and sustains me each day as I find my way in this new chapter in my life."
- Steve Brickman

2023 Events

7.27.23
20th Annual
Lift Your Spirits
Auction & Dinner | 6pm

11.12.23
Junior Board's 6th Annual
Magic City Mac + Cheese Festival
Back Forty Beer Co. | 1-4 pm

12.10.23
Tree of Lights
Homewood Central Park

FINDING HOPE TOGETHER

2022:
Year in Review

The 2022 year for Community Grief Support (CGS) began with several major challenges. Our Administrative Director Lisa Sims Harrison announced she was retiring, and our treasurer advised us her accounting firm could no longer perform our pro-bono accounting services.

The CGS Board searched for a new administrative director and hired Catherine Pittman Smith who had previously served on our board for two years; she joined us in April. The Board interviewed several accounting firms and chose DiPiazza La Rocca Heeter & Co., LLC (DLHC) to perform our accounting functions. To round out our team, CGS also hired Erin Slaughter as the Events and Marketing Manager in August.

While our country continued to be affected by COVID, it did not impede CGS from walking out our mission of providing free grief counseling, support groups, and community education to grieving individuals and families. In fact, over the last two years, we saw a 40-percent increase in the need for our grief services – largely due to COVID. Those numbers plateaued in 2022 yet are still higher than pre-COVID. We also were invited to conduct several Grief-in-the-Workplace interventions for two local churches and businesses where a death or loss occurred. Our spousal-loss support group curriculum was also updated this year.

Community Grief Support's 2022 fundraising events were the most successful they have ever been. Against all odds – our 19th Annual "Lift Your Spirits" (LYS) fundraiser, raised nearly $100,000 despite losing power in the midst of a torrential rainstorm. Guests endured extreme weather, and we continued the evening by candlelight. Micki Glass and Susan Tieszen, LYS co-chairs, did a wonderful job of setting just the perfect, festive, and fun atmosphere.

The 5th Annual "Magic City Mac + Cheese Festival" hosted at Back Forty was a tremendous success. The cold weather didn't hold guests back in the least—we had record attendance! Erin Slaughter, Events & Marketing Manager, did an outstanding job.

2022 was the first year to host an actual event for our "Tree of Lights" fundraiser which proved to be a success and a memorable evening for all who came. It, too, brought in a record amount.

Even with the challenges we faced this year, we continued to carry out our mission and end the year in a strong financial position. This could not have been accomplished without our dedicated staff, board members, and volunteers.

Bob Butler
2022 CGS Board Chair

2023 Advisory Council

Charles E. Alexander | Linda Bachus | Carlton Baker | Peggy Balliet | Dr. Neal Berte | Judge Sharon Blackburn | Lois Caldwell | Charles Chamblee | Beth Chapman | C. Fred Daniels | John P. Darnall III | Dr. Doug Dortch Trudie F. Gruman | Anne H. Hightower | Dr. Edwin Hurley | Susan Jackson | Frank Jones | Maureen Jordan Chuck King | Tom Mahoney | Dr. Sadis Matalon | Scott McBrayer | Rev. Peggy A. McClure | Barbara Moore Thomas I. Nelson | Robby E. Owens | Dr. Tom Rains | Dr. Lee Ann Riesenburg | Ben Schillaci | Terry Slaughter The Very Rev. Craig Smalley | J. Terrell Spencer, M.D. | Bobby S. Terry, D.Min., S.T.D. | Judge Scott Vowell Dr. Andrew Westmoreland | Chee-Vee Whitfield | Odessa Woofolk

2023 Board of Directors

CHAIR
Peggy R. Hicks
Finance Manager
I-20 Truck Sales, LLC

VICE CHAIR
Martha S. Barber, Ed. D
Principal
New Hope Christian School

SECRETARY
Deb Kattus
Retired Teacher, MBHS

TREASURER
Robert M. House (Bob)
Retired Executive

Jerry C. Boles, CPA
Retired Accountant

Steven A. Brickman
Attorney/Stockholder
Dentons Sirote

Robert Butler
Retired Project Manager
Jeffcoat & Associates

Richard E. "Dick" Coffee, III
Owner/Publisher
Dick Coffee Enterprises

Monica Crews
Community Volunteer

Micki Glass
CGS Volunteer &
Friendship Group Leader

Carla McEwen
SouthPoint Bank

Janice Rogers
FOX 6 News Anchor
Good Day Alabama

Susan W. Tieszen
Community Volunteer

Claudia Williams, Ed. D
Adjunct Professor, UAB

Professional Staff

Catherine Pittman Smith
Administrative Director

Steve Sweatt, LPC-S, LMFT
Clincal Director

Erin Slaughter
Events & Marketing Manager

Clinical Director Message

Trends
Grief is becoming increasingly traumatic – a painful realization which cannot be denied given our frequent exposure to mass shootings and suicides. Downward pressures associated with an increasingly financialized, service sector economy; lack of viable economic opportunity and upward mobility; changing social mores; and isolation and anonymity all contribute to depression, anxiety, desperation, malaise, and nihilism. The result is increased violence toward others and ourselves. We are witnessing a heightened need for adult-child-loss grief and trauma counseling due to the unremitting plague of young adult homicides and suicides. I am securing training and certification as a traumatologist for the purpose of integrating trauma-informed therapy into our support services.

We are developing a partnership with Brother Let's Talk, a mental-health consortium providing counseling/community education for families impacted by gun violence in our African American communities. CGS will provide consultative and other support in hopes that our mutual collaboration will make a decisive impact in lessening the retaliatory violence. We will co-sponsor a community-wide Suicide Conference for mental-health professionals, clergy, and the public in August with the University of Montevallo. This initiative's thrust is to increase public awareness and education of suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention, as well as responsiveness to suicide bereavement.

We are increasingly seeing more diversity in the needs of bereavement-care consumers, particularly young adults. With this in mind, we must maintain flexibility concerning our program structure. Our provision of a Young-Adult-/Parent-/Sibling-Loss support group, led by a young adult, is one example of enhancing program diversity and flexibility. Usage of young-adult graduate counseling interns to address the age-specific concerns/interests of this growing demographic group constitutes yet another effort to respond in a more focused manner. Hiring additional staff and raising more funds will be vital in maintaining our flexibility and responsiveness to diverse interests and concerns, and the growing demand for our services.

Because of economic difficulties, loss survivors will have less discretionary income to pay for quality mental-health and wellness services. We are also seeing a need to integrate spiritual reflection and practice in the survivorship journey. While having access to multiple alternatives (Grief Share/Dinner Party) is beneficial for loss survivors, emphasizing our professional expertise, loss-specific group orientation, free services, faith-based heritage, and use of alumni volunteers in a peer-to-peer mentoring process will foster our continued presence as a viable, distinctive, and attractive support option.

Needs
To meet the growing demand for services, CGS will focus on recruitment and training of alumni volunteers to assist with direct care of loss survivors. In addition to increased marketing efforts, we will also identify, cultivate, and expand partnerships with other nonprofit agencies to meet demand and increase our visibility in the community. The hiring of a part-time counselor to assist with provision of counseling services constitutes yet another priority for 2023 – a hire which will meet the growing demand for our services and allow for my focus on support group expansion and volunteer development.

Successes
2022 successes included increased exposure and accessibility through online, support-group registration, growth of our friendship group program, and the post-pandemic resumption of our community education offerings. We saw the expansion of our Grief-in-the-Workplace initiative for bereavement-impacted businesses/congregations. We provided support to an inner-city congregation experiencing a transition in leadership due to the loss of a much-loved pastor; another congregation devastated by the occurrence of multiple, catastrophic losses; the Birmingham Zoo's staff mourning the death of a lioness; and a business which suffered the unexpected, tragic loss of a longtime, treasured employee in an industrial accident.

W. Stephen Sweatt, LPC-S/ LMFT
Clinical and Co-Executive Director

2022 Impact: By The Numbers

1,335
Counseling, support groups, crisis intervention, & community education hours

16+
Loss-specific bereavement support groups

225
Support group meetings

837
Individual, couples, & family counseling hours

368
Telephone intakes

4
Grief-in-the-Workplace interventions

102
Professional consultations

16
Community education programs (311 loss survivors served)

16
Friendship Groups for ongoing social support

43,758
Direct marketing contacts (mail, phone, email, social media)

1,430
Bereavement-trained volunteer service hours

60,000+
Loss survivors served since 1996

19th Annual "Lift Your Spirits"

The 19th Annual Lift Your Spirits (LYS) was an amazing event for Community Grief Support (CGS) in 2022! Raising almost $100,000 – we set a quite a precedent and raised more monies in our 27-year history. CGS proved to be the "Little Nonprofit that Could" when we lost power 15 minutes into the evening. Despite the torrential downpour, we entertained, dined, auctioned, and funded needs all in the dark.

Lift Your Spirits Co-Chairs Micki Glass and Susan Tieszen and their team decorated Vestavia Country Club in a festive, causal beach theme. The room was replete with palm trees, a balloon arch, a kiddie pool stocked full of wine, lawn games, and dinner tables ladened with shells, orchids, faux sand, and luminaries. With over 160 guests, we dined as though it were an intimate candlelight dinner for two.

The inclement weather didn't deter our guests from bidding on the fabulous silent auction which featured artwork, jewelry, family experiences, and sports memorabilia –raising almost $9,000.

Christie King hosted our live auction which featured trips to the Gulf Coast, Mexico, and Tuscany; stock-the-bar; and local dining – touting $13,300. And guests raised their paddles to Fund-a-Need for $17,200.

Our guests stayed until the end – helping raise money for CGS's grief counseling, support groups, and community education – and we far exceeded our goal! All monies raised are an investment in improving the overall mental health of our community. CGS grief services are provided free of charge to bereaved adults in the Greater Birmingham area who are grieving the loss of a loved one – a spouse, an adult child, a parent or grandparent, a sibling, or a friend. Save the date... and set your calendars for Thursday, July 27, 2023 – It will be an evening of fun.

2nd Annual "Tree of Lights"

TREE OF LIGHTS

For the 2022 holiday season, Community Grief Support (CGS) memorialized and celebrated the lives of those we've loved and lost in our community. At the beginning of each holiday season, CGS erects a 12-foot memorial "Tree of Lights" in Homewood Central Park beginning in November through December. At the corner of Oxmoor Road and Central Avenue – one of the most visible locations in the city – the tree, full of twinkling lights, brings cheer to residents and passersby. It serves as a reminder, a memorial to our loved ones who have passed.

This fundraiser is a palpable and engaging way for CGS to bring awareness to the subject of grief and how we individually and corporately process grief associated with the loss of someone deeply loved. People can make a donation at three different levels to sponsor a light on the "Tree of Lights," and/or receive a keepsake, calligraphed ornament or handbuilt pottery luminary in memory of a loved one. The ornaments are calligraphed by artist Amber Rosenburg, and the luminaries are created by Alabama artist Lisa Bunting Howard. Up to three memorial cards are mailed on behalf of the donor.

This year we were able to celebrate and honor our loved ones with a candlelight memorial service for the first time Sunday, November 20th in Homewood Park.

5th Annual "Magic City Mac +Cheese Festival"

Magic City Mac + Cheese Festival

The Community Grief Support's Junior Board hosted the ultimate celebration of the South's favorite comfort food, the "Magic City Mac + Cheese Festival," on Sunday, November 13, 2022. Raising over $40,000, this Mac + Cheese Festival was by far the cheesiest festival to date.

The festival was held at Back Forty Beer Company and had a record number of vendors, attendees, and even dogs! Local "celebrity" judges tasted all the mac + cheese samples and the crowd was able to vote for the "People's Choice Award."

Each team went home with an award, however, Simone's Kitchen ATL was voted as the overall winner! Porky's Pride went home with People's Choice Award! There were lot of activities for kids, including a balloon clown, face painting, a bounce house, and the Greater Birmingham Humane Society.

Save the date for the 6th Annual "Magic City Mac + Cheese Festival" to be held at Back Forty Beer Company on November 12, 2023 from 1-4PM! Come hungry!

CGS Thanks Our Major Partners!

Foundations

Baptist Health Foundation*
BCBS/The Caring Foundation*
Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham*
Daniel Foundation of Alabama*
EBSCO Industries, Inc. *
Hill Crest Foundation *
Hugh Kaul Foundation*
Independent Presbyterian Church Foundation*
Powell Family Foundation*
Protective Life Foundation*
Robert R. Meyer Foundation*
Susan Mott Webb Charitable Trust*
Thompson Foundation*
Turner Foundation*
Vulcan Materials Company Foundation*
Walker Area Community Foundation*

Community Sponsors

Adams Computer Tech*
Alabama Power Foundation*
All Saints Episcopal Church*
ARC Realty*
Asbury United Methodist Church
Back Forty Beer Company
Barbara Lummis/ARC Realty*
BCBS of Alabama*
Brasfield & Gorrie*
Canterbury United Methodist Church*
Cathedral Church of the Advent*
Christ the King Lutheran*
Cobbs Allen*
Dawson Memorial Baptist Church
EBSCO Industries, Inc.*
Edgewood Presbyterian Church
Hackney Foundation*
Homewood Parks & Recreation Board
Homewood Theatre – Kyle Bass
Joe Piper, Inc. *
Lakeside Baptist Church*
Medical Properties Trust*
Michael Hicks Services*
Mountain Brook Baptist Church*
Naphcare*
Regions Foundation*
Riverchase United Methodist Church
South Highland Presbyterian*
Southminster Presbyterian *
St. Luke's Episcopal Church*
The Crossings at Riverchase
TransAmerica Printing*
Vestavia Hills Methodist Church
Vulcan Materials Company Foundation *
Birmingham Mountain Radio
WBRC 6 – Fox News
Wood Fruitticher*

*Donations made January 1-December 31, 2022

Administrative Director Message

What a year this has been! I joined the Community Grief Support (CGS) team in April as the new Administrative Director succeeding Lisa Sims Harrison who, with a tenure of eight years, served this nonprofit faithfully, dutifully, and well. CGS was blessed by her leadership, creativity, and intentionality.

Having served on the CGS board for two years, I was an advocate for stronger PR, marketing, and strategic planning initiatives. Laughingly, as it turns out, I strategically planned myself into the job as administrative director two years later. With more than a plate full of fundraising campaigns and events, and new responsibilities and changes, I've never been more excited about a venture in all my professional career. I am a problem solver and love a challenge.

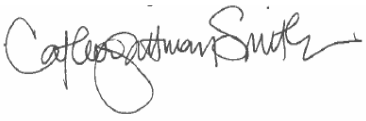
In review, 2022 was a banner year for CGS. All three of our events were incredibly successful. "Lift Your Spirits" was the most successful gala in CGS history – despite losing power, we grossed over $96,000. The CGS Junior Board's 5th annual "Magic City Mac+Cheese Festival" at Back Forty Beer Company exceeded our goal and raised $40,000 with over 3,500 attendees. The 2nd Annual "Tree of Lights" grossed almost $12,000, with the addition of a memorial service at Homewood Central Park.

Last year, we learned that we would have to move from our longtime home nestled in Homewood that Dawson has graciously provided us rent free for 20+ years. At press time, we are actively looking for a new location that is larger, accommodating for additional staff, and is strategically located.

2023 holds exciting changes for Community Grief Support. Casting a wide net and a large vision in tandem with the leadership of our Board of Directors, our goal is to posture CGS for growth and expansion. Having experienced a 40-percent increase in need for our services since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are pushed to capacity. The good news is that mental health and wellness is becoming a priority.

In addition, our 2023 priority list includes the working out of our strategic plan, including board development; intentional donor cultivation, engagement, and stewardship; more topical and responsive programing, including a suicide conference in August; developing deeper relationships, collaborations, and partnerships in our community—raising awareness and providing more access to quality grief counseling, support, and education. I am truly humbled, honored, and excited to serve as CGS's administrative director.

Gratefully,



Catherine Pittman Smith
Administrative Director

We are a community of individuals, but we have all shared the same journey, the same broken road, the same dark valley. We are not alone. Hand in hand, we find hope together.

COMMUNITY
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FINDING HOPE TOGETHER

1119 Oxmoor Road
Homewood, AL 35209

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SAVE THE DATE

7.27.2023
Lift Your Spirits

11.12.2023
Magic City
Mac + Cheese Festival

12.10.2023
Tree of Lights