

SAFE HARBOR

A PROGRAM FOR GRIEVING CHILDREN, TEENS AND FAMILIES

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS IN 2021

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NEWSLETTER

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For many of us, the arrival of 2021 could not come soon enough! To say 2020 presented us all with incredible challenges is an understatement, and the promise of a return to “normal” and person to person interaction gives us all hope. At Safe Harbor, the ushering in of 2021 has special meaning because, on January 17th, we celebrate Safe Harbor’s 20th Anniversary.

It is truly our pleasure to bring you this special 20th Anniversary Celebration newsletter as each and every one of you receiving it has played a role in making Safe Harbor what it is today: a place of safety and trust for grieving families in our community.

When founded, Safe Harbor was based on a very simple premise, that no child should grieve alone. Although we have evolved in the way we provide service, the simple design of relying on the magic of

peer support and mentoring has remained consistent. This is why we are so grateful for our volunteers, many of whom have remained with us since day one to pass along their expertise to new facilitators.

We are especially grateful to our participants, many of whom choose to return and pay forward the help they have received by mentoring new participants as buddies or volunteers. That alone speaks to the significance of Safe Harbor’s impact and lasting positive effect.

We are perpetually grateful for our donors’ generosity, and Abington-Jefferson Health’s steadfast support of our program. Without both, we would not be able to continue to offer support groups free of cost to our families.

We hope to give you a look back at just a few of the ways Safe Harbor has touched the lives we strive to help. Because no service-related organization survives this long without evolving and adjusting to changing needs, you’ll get updated on programming “pivots” during COVID-19, and, hopefully, feel our gratitude for those who continue to help Safe Harbor thrive.

Most importantly, we hope you come away with a sense of community as a part of our Safe Harbor family. Whether a donor, past or present participant or volunteer, you have played an integral part in getting Safe Harbor to this 20th year of service. We are so excited to partner with you for the next 20 years!

With gratitude,

Heide, Michelle, Caitlin, Jen and Barb



SAFE HARBOR THANKS OUR DONORS

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REMEMBERING JACQUE OLSON



It saddens us to announce that Jacquie Olson, a founder of Safe Harbor, died just short of being able to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the program she helped create.

Jacquie was an incredibly accomplished and caring woman. She graduated with a Master of Counseling in Education and went on to get her Master of Business Education. Jacquie enjoyed her early professional career in education administration before becoming Director of Home Care and Hospice Volunteers at Abington Memorial Hospital. While there, Jacquie recognized an unmet

need for children grieving the deaths of parents, and thus, the idea of Safe Harbor was born.

Her shining, caring spirit, has been mentioned as a driving force behind more than one of our original volunteers' desire to sign on to help at Safe Harbor. Many in her Safe Harbor support groups fondly remember her as a kind, empathetic facilitator.

Even after her retirement in 2006, Jacquie's connection and dedication to the program she started remained strong. She would occasionally check-in with Michelle and Debbie, and even requested Michelle come sing at her bedside while in hospice, as well as sing at her memorial service following her death.

All of us feel a deep sense of gratitude to Jacquie for having the foresight and vision to make Safe Harbor possible. We can only hope to carry her genuine caring spirit forward with us in the years ahead.

Stories of Love, Loss and Hope:

THE HARBORING HOPE PROJECT 2020



This past March, before COVID-19 restrictions went into place, Safe Harbor was able to once again hold our annual The Harboring Hope Project in person. The purpose of the weekend was to explore the creative arts more deeply, and demonstrate to our participants how we can process and express our grief through various mediums. This year's project focused on writing and art. With 13 participants, ages 7 to 17, and eight Safe Harbor volunteers, we were able to create a book in just two days! To help others who have also experienced a loss, the kids and teens chose the book's chapter titles, topics, and the purpose of the book. They wanted to share their stories in case someone else reads them and thinks: "I feel like that too."

We were blown away by the brave honesty among all participants, not just in the writings of the book, but in all the art activities, and social time they shared. The older teens impressed us with the level of support and compassion they showed to the younger kids. You can see just how special when reading personal stories and viewing photos of meaningful art.

Here are some excerpts:

- "It's ok to be sad." –Gwen, age 7
- "You might want to go one way but you can't because life doesn't lead you that way." –Carter, age 10
- "Dear Cigarettes, You're swimming in a river of money given to you by those who gave their health away for an addiction that's so hard to fight." –Collin, age 17

We hope to be able to share this book with the community on our website in the near future.



SAFE HARBOR@HOME

When we made the switch to virtual groups, we decided that the best way to provide grief support across all ages was to create a special curriculum. This allowed us to provide craft and activity supplies to each participant, ensuring that they could open up about their grief in creative ways without worrying about whether they had the required materials at home.

One unique aspect of our groups is our Music and Art specialist visits. To make sure that families participating in virtual groups and those on our Safe Harbor @Home list could continue to benefit from their creativity, they created a series of activity videos that complement our Zoom curriculum. Our "likes" and "views" continue to grow. Some of the music and art activities tackle nightmares, telling your story, and worries. We hope to have all our videos on our website soon.

To support our grieving families that are awaiting in person groups again, the team continued to send out a biweekly Wednesday

Blast that includes Safe Harbor announcements, community resources, COVID-19 resources and grief resources.

This Fall, our staff facilitator, Barbara Strokovsky, introduced her "Mindful Moments." The purpose of simple and short activities is to teach our families how to practice mindfulness in their everyday life.



**Safe Harbor
Presents:
Game Night
@ Home!**

To engage our families both attending and opting to wait for in person groups, we hosted a virtual game night in the Fall.

TWENTY YEARS OF HEALING



Former Safe Harbor participants, volunteers and staff share their experiences with the program.



The time we spent at Safe Harbor, both being in the program and volunteering, changed us in the best possible way. Being a teenager is hard enough and losing a loved one during that time is even harder. Safe Harbor taught me and my parents how to better communicate with one another, support each other, and know that we were not alone through it all. I still am close with the people I met through Safe Harbor and I like to think of them as family.
—Gabrielle Rabadi former participant and Camp Charlie volunteer for five years.



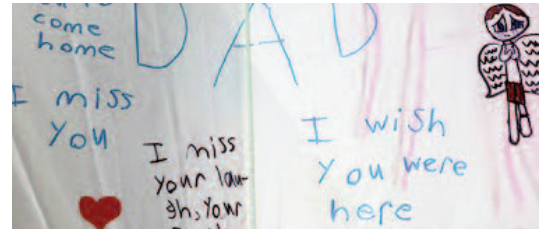
I can honestly say my daughter healed from the grief she had from losing her brother because of the support she received at Safe Harbor. I brought my daughter, Gabby, to Safe Harbor ten years ago. She went for two years, facilitated a year, then passed the baton to me to facilitate. This is my 6th year, and it has been extremely rewarding for me to give back to such a tremendous program.
—Anne Rabadi, former participant and current Safe Harbor volunteer.



Being a young adolescent when I first started Safe Harbor, I felt a sense of connectedness to fellow group members. I felt comforted knowing that I had a space to share whatever I was feeling. I was reassured that I was never alone in my grieving process. I still keep in contact with members from over a decade ago. Becoming a facilitator was an amazing experience that helped me see how far I have come in my grieving process. I felt honored to share my experiences, as well as my coping strategies with young people, who can relate with me in ways that no one else can.
—Ray Gallagher, former participant and volunteer.



I was part of the group for about two years. I lost a child, and although most lost a spouse, I still felt included and able to grieve. I loved having others that could understand and guide you on how to parent a grieving child. During that time, I found forever friends in my group and still stay in touch with them. The facilitators were knowledgeable and really knew how to guide the adult group in the right direction. Also, my children still talk about the many activities and memorial projects they did in their group. They liked being with children that understood loss.
—Jill Osterhout, former participant.



TWENTY YEARS OF GIVING

Safe Harbor Program



We must congratulate the current staff, Michelle Balcer, Heide Marcelis, Caitlin Lynch, Jen Schmauk and Barbara Strokovsky, for their continued passion, creativity, and ongoing commitment to the Safe Harbor Program! They have truly taken this program to a new level as they offer virtual groups (due to the Covid-19 pandemic), school outreach, as well as the breadth of music and art designed to reach a deeper level of the grieving process. —Debbie Teasdale and Donna Young, Safe Harbor co-founders and current volunteers.



Safe Harbor is a unique program that provides the type of support grieving families need at no cost. It has the best interests of its participants in mind, and it prepares them to explore and understand their grief. Safe Harbor was instrumental in getting my family back on our feet. We were able to learn from those around us and talk about the issues we faced everyday. Through Safe Harbor I made lifelong friendships that still have a meaningful impact on my life today. —Kenny Siry, former participant, Safe Harbor volunteer for two years and Camp Charlie Volunteer for ten years.

Safe Harbor is a place led and facilitated by the most caring, giving people you could hope to meet. It has been my great honor to be a part of Safe Harbor throughout its 20 years. I've worn a few different hats—facilitator for middle schoolers, launching the first Young Adult group with Betsy, staff facilitator and newsletter designer. —Ginny Freyer, former staff, volunteer and current newsletter designer.



There is an opportunity for healing and growth at Safe Harbor, during a time when life seems very dark, and each participant can find something helpful. It might be a craft or a song or a game played with group members. It will definitely be the presence and understanding of the participants and facilitators. Even just sitting in the group can be helpful. Our society has tended to make grief seem abnormal and looked for a 'fix' or cure. Safe Harbor helps people learn about and normalize grief as a process, a part of an individual life path-way, unique to each person. —Lorie Verderame, former staff and current volunteer.

The power of Safe Harbor's support groups is incredible. Through a variety of activities designed to address themes of grief, Safe Harbor has helped our children, teens and caregivers identify and deal with the myriad of emotions that come with a significant loss. As well, this program helps to keep alive the many memories of the person who has died. It is a place of safety for its participants, allowing them to share with others who are going through many of the same things they are. —Julie Behr, former staff and current volunteer.

A year like no other: Camp Charlie @Home June 2020

Based on *You Are Not Alone*, a Michael Jackson song. We have re-written this song with our own words.

You're Still Here with Me:

We hope you hear our song, to
mom and dad not gone
For you're still here with me,
though I miss you terribly
Wildwood was so fun, roller
coasters in the sun
A bear to cuddle when I sleep,
A special letter that I keep.

I am not alone, For I am still
with you
When I watch TV or when I'm
at the beach
I am not alone, I feel you with
me
When I wear your shirt or ride
bikes in the dirt.

Everyday I know you're some-
where near and I can make you
proud
Your voice still whispers in my
ear, I can hear it loud:

"I am proud of you, your schol-
arship and grades all through-
out school year was success,
You bring me happiness"
I miss you when I swim, or hyp-
notize the chickens
I wish you were still here, But I
feel you so clear.

Everyday when I see a butterfly
or rainbow in the sky
Look at car mechanics or a
jewelry gift from you...

I don't feel alone, For you're still
here with me
I can hear you say "let's get
Sam's pizza again today"
I'll keep you confident in me, I'll
keep telling your bad jokes
Then you whisper in my ear,
with your weird laugh that I still
hear:

I am not alone, no I am not
alone,
You're still here with me, You're
still here with me.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced our program, like so many others, to make a quick transition to a virtual platform. To create an engaging and effective creative arts grief camp, our staff worked tirelessly to learn new technology, to discover Zoom-friendly activities, and to put activity bags together for families to pick-up. While having to completely adapt our camp to fit our virtual needs, we continued to remain focused on the needs of the children we serve. Twenty campers, ages 6 to 12, participated in a different art modality over three days in Zoom "Break Out Rooms." We are so proud of each and every camper as they not only shared deeply and honestly over Zoom, they also continued our peer support model of helping and encouraging each other! Our camp spirit was fostered with fun daily challenges and of course, our camp cheer!

Art

For this year's art activity campers created their very own special shadow box assemblage based on memories and/or things they have learned from their special person. They were each given an unfinished wooden shadow box, paint, glue and various objects. Using items and photos from around the house, they were able to create their very own "memory treasure trove." Boxes can symbolize the emotions we keep inside and this concept of an "open box" campers had the opportunity to visually showcase their emotions and memories.

Stations

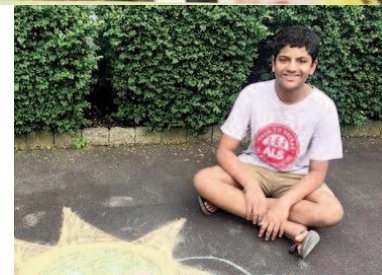
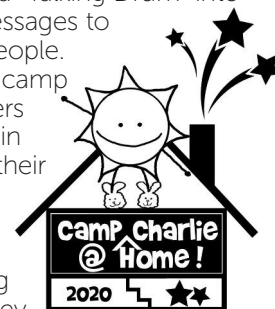
"Stations" helped campers explore the emotions they have following the death of someone significant in their life. What happens when we feel all mixed up inside? The good and bad feelings can make us feel like we are going to burst. What does that look like? How do we handle that burst? What/who do we have around us that can help us? On Stations Day, campers created personal volcanoes, went on a scavenger hunt both inside and outside, and created a coping fortune teller project to help in those times of overwhelming feelings. The goal was to provide both an outlet to talk about negative emotions, as well as healthy strategies to process them.

Music

This year, Music was all about finding a lasting and healthy connection with our special person who died. Do you have things left unsaid? Did you have a chance to say good-

bye? Are thoughts and worries weighing on you? What would you like them to know about you? Campers addressed these very questions by creating a "Talking Drum" into which they placed messages to their special person/people.

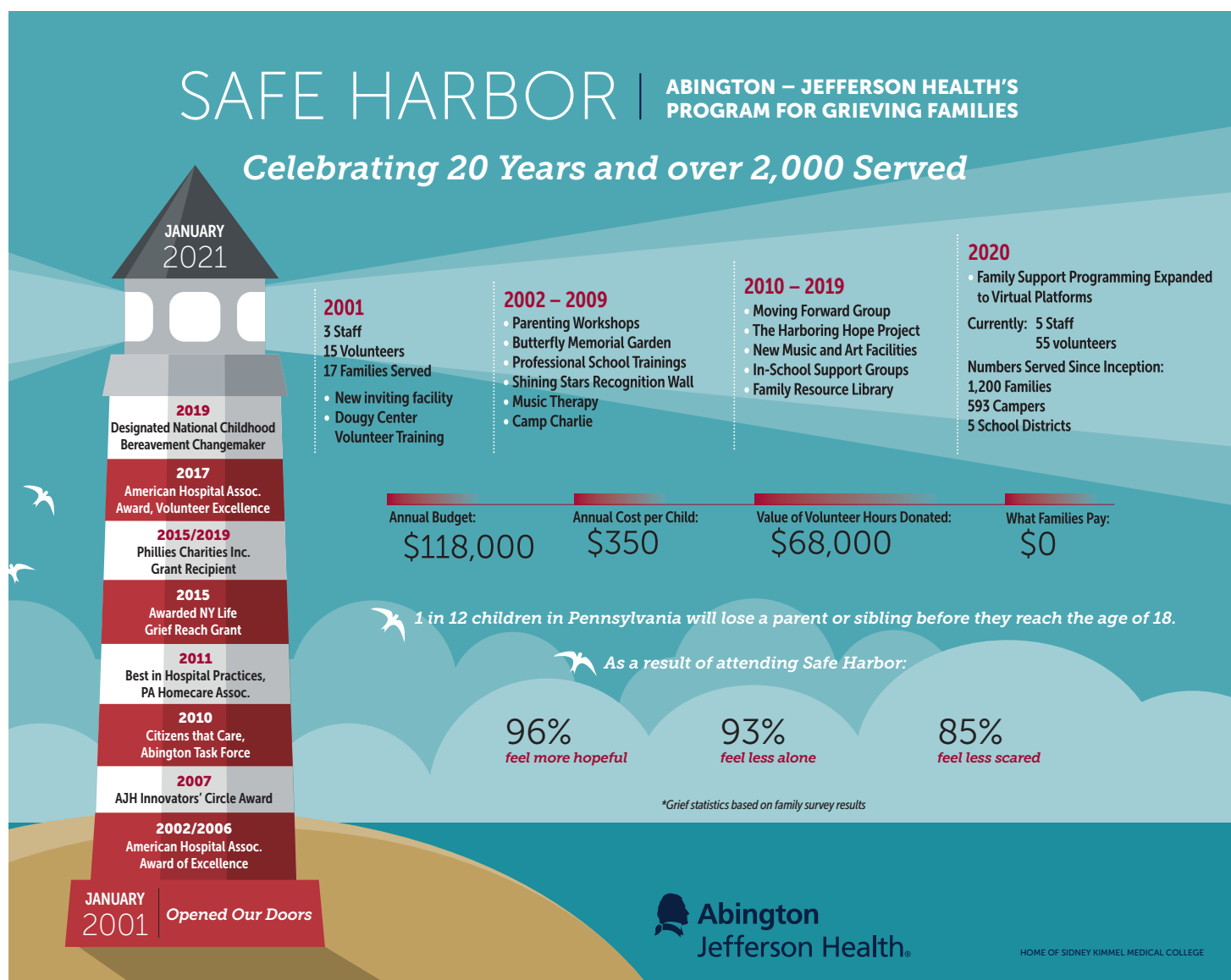
On our final day of camp we invited our campers and their families to join us over Zoom where their song was performed. Campers also shared their thoughts and feelings by highlighting the art and projects they created. We (staff) worried about having an impact on families when going virtual, however, that was all for naught! Families loved the gathering and gave positive feedback about their camper's experiences.

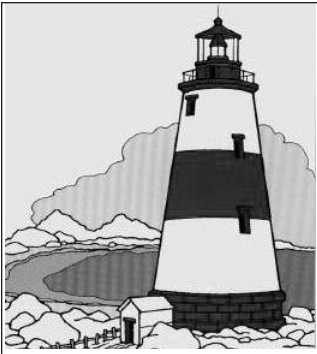


20TH ANNIVERSARY

To celebrate 20 years of providing hope and healing to our community, with the help of philanthropy, we put together a brief retrospective of Safe Harbor's accomplishments. This infographic shows how the program has grown since 2001, not only in staff but in the number of families we've been able to serve. The 2015 New York Life Grief Reach Grant afforded us the opportunity to provide support to even more children and teens in our community through school groups—reaching

those that may other not be able to come to our regular programming. It continues to warm our hearts that because of support from Abington - Jefferson Health, donors, volunteers and our families we have been able to provide grief support—completely free of charge—for the last 20 years. Their continued backing of this program allows us to do what we do best—provide support to those that are grieving the death of a loved one. We are looking forward to the next 20 years!





A lighthouse is a beacon, a light in the darkness for lost or weary travelers. We have chosen the lighthouse as the Safe Harbor symbol. It represents our commitment to providing the bereaved with a safe place to feel supported and understood by others and hope for finding a light through the pain of their loss.



SAFE HARBOR – 20 YEARS AND GROWING

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