Olinger Moore Howard Funeral Chapel

Innovative Idea:

## Monthly Grief Support Group

As a funeral home we learned long ago the responsibility we hold with each and every family we are entrusted to help. We found that we have a responsibility to help, lead and guide both before services are held, and also after. Funeral Directors are often called upon to render advice, guidance and direction to those who have recently suffered a loss. We are asked to play the role of a minister, a therapist, a mediator, and many more. These positions, while flattering are ones that we are simply not trained for, nor typically educated within. We did however see the value of helping our families in one of the specific areas in which they were calling out for. This area was a monthly grief support group.

Our group began in January of 2009. The group was a success in helping families with their grief from day one. We had positive feedback, and an overall feeling that what we were doing was working for these families. As the remainder of 2009 closed out we found that the group was becoming somewhat stagnant. The issue of recruiting new grieving families was sporadic. Our group was structured as an open group; meaning that anyone could attend at anytime. We began with an open door policy from day one. It was evident however that for the group to survive we needed to make some changes for the end of 2009 and the beginning of 2010.

One of the large changes we made was the introduction of guest speakers. We invited one such speaker to our funeral home to speak about death and dying towards the end of 2009. This was done as a significant improvement to our support group structure. It was also done in response to what our core group of attendees told us they wanted and needed.

Another significant upgrade to our monthly support group from its inception in early 2009 was a stronger approach at marketing and advertising for the group. This was accomplished through in-house advertising and media, as well as a community based approach. To begin the group was mainly made up of only those who had suffered a loss and been helped by our funeral home. As 2009 ended and 2010 began, we saw people coming in for support that we as a funeral home did not help. We saw people coming to the group that heard of the group from the means listed above.

The last improvement to the group was the decision to cease the current structure and move towards a closed group. This simply meant starting small, short bursts of monthly support group meetings for those who wanted to attend. Rather than allow anyone, at anytime; we felt a move to a powerful, 3 month burst might carry new weight and new grief support for our attendees. This would be just enough of a change to attract new attendees and garner new commitments from regular attendees.

Overall, the support group has been a great endeavor for our funeral home. It has allowed our staff to gain knowledge and experience that would have been impossible to learn in a classroom. It has made us a better trained and more educated staff when it comes to offering help, guidance leadership. For our families, it has meant a safe, inviting place for them to come and experience their grief. We have successfully adapted to what our families have told us. Rather than simply refer on or offer outside help to our families, we decided to create a place to fill the void and the need that our families told us they desired.