

Reynolds-Jonkhoff Funeral Home and Cremation Services, Traverse City, MI

Rationale behind the idea

Hannah Bear, the coloring book was developed after a need was seen for children who experience a death in their family. As a funeral director, some of the questions I get asked most frequently relate to children. For example: what age child should come to a service? How do I explain death to a child? How do I explain a cemetery to a child? Is it OK to cry around my children? Is it OK for my child to see a dead person? How do I explain cremation to a child? The list goes on and on. After researching the available materials and books out there, nothing struck me as exactly what I wanted to endorse to the families that I serve. After discussing this dilemma with my mom/boss, I learned it had also been one of her dreams to create a book for kids about our funeral home. Soon after our initial meeting, I had the idea for "Hannah Bear". Hannah Bear is named after the man who built our funeral home. Perry Hannah was a lumber baron and the so-called father and founder of our town, Traverse City, Michigan. We had previously created Hannah Bear teddy bears to give to kids as a cuddle companion. I thought it would be the perfect idea to have Hannah Bear answer the questions children and adults have in a very simple manner. Now that I had my inspiration, I began to write down my thoughts. I hand wrote the text and described in great detail what I wanted each coloring page image to look like. I researched and read every book I could get my hands on relating to children and death and compiled what I thought was the most important

questions, explanations and tips. I edited and edited and finally decided to type out the first draft. Next I sent my first draft to world-renown grief expert and personal friend, Mary Raymer. She gave me several helpful critiques and I was now in search of an illustrator. Luck would have it, I found the perfect illustrator less than six blocks from our funeral home, Jenifer Thomas. We met a few days later and discussed my idea and exactly what I wanted. After a few drafts of edits, the final project was complete and it was off to the printer in just four months. I could not be more proud to share the finished project with the families that our funeral home serves and eventually any funeral home that would like to offer it. It is my hope that this book not only helps children, but adults as well. Although each page is geared towards children, I believe adults will learn as much from it, if not more, than the children. The book and its teddy bear cuddly companion are available throughout our funeral home, in our family lounge, in our kid's playroom and in our resource room. We encourage all of our staff to offer them to the families we serve. We also have them in all of our vehicles for our transfer team so that if the death occurs at a family home, our transfer team can give the children a bear and a coloring book. This book, although simple in nature, has the potential to help nearly all of our families as it can be given to children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, relatives and friends.

Detailed description of the program/service/activity

Please find the enclosed copy of the Hannah Bear coloring book; Order form information for other firms to order their own customized coloring book; and form presented to funeral homes at the time they receive their order which explains how to best use the coloring book. The main avenue that we have used to promote this idea was thanks to my award winning presentation at the Selected Independent Funeral Homes Annual Meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana on September 19, 2015. The funeral homes in attendance were very receptive to my idea and many asked for more information. We are in the process of working with funeral homes from across the country so that Hannah Bear can help even more people. We were also able to promote Hannah Bear's coloring book through our local media with a press release and photo as appear in this section.

Benefits provided to families and/or the community at large

The feedback we have received from families has been very positive. I have received several thank you notes for creating the coloring book and making it available to the public. Some examples are included in the documentation section. Unfortunately, because we chose to make them available to our families during funerals and visitations, and because we encourage families to use these at home, we often don't see or hear the benefits. However, I know that by opening the door

of communication between adults and children, I am helping both the adults and the children. Communication is one of the keys to help cope with grief, and this book facilitates open, honest and genuine communication in a very non-threatening way. This is true for not only our community, but any funeral home who creates their own coloring book too. For example, the Baue Bear in Missouri and Barney Bear in Massachusetts helps their families and community.

Benefits provided to funeral home and staff

We are the only funeral home in our area that offers a personalized coloring book for children. This not only sets us apart from our competition, it shows our families, and everyone who walks through our doors just how much we care about having a healthy grief experience for all ages. Our staff feels so good being able to offer the coloring book to the families that they serve. We also encourage our transfer team to give the books at the time and place of death if it is appropriate.

Our transfer team often remarks on how good they felt when they were able to give the family something, when they normally are taking something, something that is so precious, one of their family members. It feels much better to give than to take, even though the book is a small consolation and nothing in comparison to their family member, it still feels good to give something as a token of their sympathy.

Community organizations involved

We have invited a local grief support organization, called Michael's Place to use the coloring book at their discretion and when appropriate. We met with the leaders of Michael's Place and they were so encouraged to hear that we, along with them, care deeply about the health and grief experience of children and adults, and those with special needs. We hope to deepen our relationship with Michael's Place and use the coloring book as a tool with other similar organizations in the future. Please see the enclosed photo for a highlight of our meeting as well as a photo of Dr. Barbara McIntyre, a children's grief therapist, in our funeral home lounge.