

Category #1; Criteria 1

**Good Grief Art**

As we are aware that grief can be a difficult emotion for anyone, regardless of age, professionals in grief counseling and art therapy work together to address effective non-verbal therapeutic approaches for those dealing with grief. According to *New Jersey Art Therapy*, researchers have worked to show the effectiveness of art therapy for bereaved individuals of all ages. When someone is experiencing grief, it is important for him or her to not feel isolated, but rather to be surrounded and supported by his or her community. Having a support network is one of the effective ways that those experiencing grief can begin to heal. When the support network encourages art-making, especially among young people who have difficulty verbalizing their feelings, the grief may become easier to bear.

*“Art making has the ability to move people along their journey of grief and loss into a more balanced place of healing and hope. In the face of tragedy, the creative process can help recalibrate a mourner’s life.” ~ The Chandler Gallery at Maud Morgan Arts*

Twice a year our funeral home sponsors a program called “*Good Grief Art: Learn to PAINT thru your loss.*” We do this in conjunction with the Abington Senior Community Center. The Senior Center is a local facility that fosters interactions between seniors in our community. The concept of this program was created by the conjoined efforts of our staff. It was implemented in spring of 2016.

The sessions ran for eight weeks. Each class was 90 minutes in length. The program was free of charge and there was no previous art experience necessary to register. Each participant was asked to bring a photograph of a personal loss whatever it may have been. Grief and loss comes in many forms so participants had no restrictions on which photograph they selected. Participants would then learn how to paint these photographs using oil paints. We were lucky enough to have a wonderful local professional portrait artist, Marylou Chibirka, a Pennsylvania Council of the Arts Roistered Artist lead each class. She walked participants through the oil painting process. Our staff would regularly visit the classes. They would provide handouts about the processes of grieving and offer helpful hints about working through the bereavement process. In the past on occasion guest speakers would be scheduled from hospices and grief support groups. Renowned violinist Ihor Shablovsky would perform at the senior center in conjunction with the Good Grief: Thru Art program.

The first 8 week program went smoothly. Upon the conclusion of our first session we decided to enhance the program further to better serve our community. We realized the positive impact it had on those who participated. At this point we decided to offer an additional 8 week session each year. Doing this would make it easier for more members of our community to partake in the program. It also allowed those who may have been in a prior 8-week session to return if they felt the program had been helpful to their personal healing.

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These classes provide for participants a chance to meet others with similar situation allow bonds to be formed and new friendships established. We wanted these classes to be a safe place where participants can openly express themselves. Though participants may be struggling with loss these classes also help remind participants to remember positive and loving memories of what was lost. Observing this process was eye opening. It was exceedingly evident that creating art was indeed helpful during each participant's bereavement process. When the session ended many participants stayed in contact with each other. They even worked collaboratively on a publicly displayed mural in a local government building. A French painter by the name of George Braque once stated, "Art is a wound turned into Light." He could not have been any more accurate.

The "Good Grief Art" program is not the only art program our staff has been involved with. Christopher C. Calvey has personally helped design several art programs through the Lackawanna County Arts and Culture department. He has attended various trainings in an effort to better serve the arts and culture community. For example, the Butterfly Forrest is an event where individuals of all ages have the opportunity to personally paint a butterfly. The painted butterflies were on public display and others were encouraged take a painted butterfly home, hoping they would think of their own transformation in expressing their healing to support others. These individuals are asked to share their own personal stories of transformation with others on social media. This encourages unity through a common topic that is relatable to all participants. Another example is "Art in the Park." This program gives children of all ages the opportunity to come together and create art, free of charge, in different parks all over the county. This event encourages expression through art and an opportunity for children to work together and form new relationships. There are also programs focused on bringing music and dance into the community. These programs and performances take place in veteran and senior centers as well as at public venues. These performance are sponsored by our funeral home to provide pleasurable times and to restore fond memories of years past. It is obvious that watching these performances is helpful and enjoyable by every audience. Our staff supports and assists with *Festival of Trees*, a program that various holiday trees are decorated organizations such as hospices, civic organization and individuals. We encourage or invite families we have served to become involved as the holidays will not be the same, but we help them seek new ways to attempt to enjoy or survive the holidays. During the holiday season we personal deliver an artist designed *Tree of Life* hand blown glass ornaments to the families we have served the past year in hopes they will talk of their loved one.

Art has proven in many ways to be helpful to so many in various situations. It allows for individualized forms of expression. It can indeed open the heart and soul. That is why the "Good Grief Art" program is so important. Some topics can be hard to talk about but through art many can speak without words and make a true impact of themselves personally as well as on others that surround them.