

# Volunteer Newsletter

## October 2022

### A note from Robin Haynes Volunteer Coordinator



## Northern Light Hospice Bereavement Program

Northern Light Home Care & Hospice provides bereavement care and support to family members and caregivers following the death of the Hospice patient. This support extends for 13 months which goes beyond the anniversary date of the patient's death. Each of the Northern Light Home Care & Hospice offices throughout the state have a Bereavement Coordinator that will follow up with the bereaved as needed, based on the evaluation of needs and interest in receiving support.

Services that can be provided by the Bereavement Coordinator are a monthly mailing newsletter (Grief Notes), phone calls, bereavement visits, Grief Support Groups, as well as an Annual Memorial Service to remember those that died while under our Hospice program. These services vary depending on availability. Some of these services are also available to individuals and families from our communities that have experienced a significant loss and would benefit from our grief support.

Our hospice volunteers play an important part with our bereavement care. Bereavement volunteers send cards, help with monthly mailings, and helped to make bereavement follow up phone calls. In Aroostook County, currently, four volunteers have completed additional training specific to making bereavement phone calls and make calls to 25-40 bereaved every month. There are times that a message is left and other times that bereaved will talk for a half hour or more. Our bereavement coordinator has received compliments and expressions of gratitude for the phone calls. At times family members reach out to share 'thanks' for voice messages that Bereavement volunteers have left. – Families say how much it meant that someone reached out, was thinking of them, and really cared.

Volunteers share that, friends have asked them, "Isn't it sad making such calls?" It's true that some calls pull at the heart strings, but often the lingering feeling is that of gratitude to be able to be a listening ear for someone who *really* needed to tell their story.

## Why do I make bereavement calls?

*Pam Crawford, Volunteer, Aroostook*

1. It all started because during the pandemic it provided a way for me to continue participating as a volunteer, working from home to make the calls.
2. Soon after I completed the first month's calls, I realized that in a role of simply being a good listener, I could make a difference in someone's day. Many bereaved family members have no one nearby to talk with and many have stories to tell, worries to discuss, fears to explain.
3. Most appreciate the calls, and the feedback is often immediate, in words or otherwise. That is easily "feel good stuff" and it makes my day, too.
4. Maybe my personal grief experience can be helpful to others, but I am careful to apply other hospice training to this endeavor. This is not about me. At rare times I offer my insights or share (with permission) insights of others, but only after a level of rapport has been created and I sense that my input may be welcome.
5. This is a way for us to continue to connect with the families who trusted hospice to care for their loved ones and to let them know that hospice remains available as a resource during their grieving.
6. When family members and friends are given space to talk about their loved ones, share memories and talk about how they're coping they seem to relax a bit, overcome with the relief that someone else cares, understands, and is supportive. There are no pre-established boundaries to these conversations (no family baggage or history involved), so those grieving are often more open to talking freely and just appreciating the availability of the non-judgmental listener on the other end of the phone line.
7. I have found that those receiving the calls appreciate compassion. Many will say that their family members and friends have urged them to "move on" and have become tired of listening to their grief. That leaves them without anyone holding space for them, so the bereavement caller is in a role they need and want.
8. We may talk about self-care during grief or preparing for an upcoming holiday, all depending on the needs of the bereaved. Again, I ask questions in the hopes that the person's own answers lead him/her in a direction that will be helpful, making their own choices about coping with their grief under circumstances they bring up. Is that helpful? I hope so.

9. I do allow the bereaved person to talk and express their grief in whatever way they need. This may include crying, anger, laughing, and expressions of guilt or regret. Not trained as a counselor, I do not offer advice or suggestions or answer the question, "What would you do if \_\_\_\_\_?", but I turn that back over to them by asking what they may have considered, planned, or done. This seems to cause the bereaved to think a bit more about their own options, to discuss those further, and to recognize how they choose to handle their grief in the present moment. (Note: I DO cry or laugh with them.)

10. On the rare occasions when the bereaved indicates a need for more help and support than I can offer, I provide the phone number for George McLaughlin, Hospice Bereavement Coordinator, and explain a bit about his role. If I sense an emergency (which has been rare), I call George immediately. Early intervention just makes sense, so the continuing support of the hospice team is invaluable in such situations.

11. Some bereaved do not feel like talking, maybe just that day I called or maybe on most of their days. If they don't feel like talking, I don't push them. The resulting conversation may be short, maybe even a tad uncomfortable for both of us, and my usual questions may go unasked/unanswered, but at least the person I've called knows hospice is thinking of them and is interested in their well-being and in maintaining a connection.

Maybe that's the bottom line for me – the WHY of making these calls - maintaining the connection. With compassion, caring, and concern.

### The Aroostook Volunteer support meeting

Now scheduled for Monday, **October 17** (instead of October 10) from **6:30-7:30pm** via **MS Teams**.

*Invitation link will be sent closer to date.*



## A note from Ali Maguire Volunteer Coordinator

### Upcoming Monthly Volunteer Meeting:

October 25th 9:00-10:00 and 11:00-12:00.

Attendance permitted in person or via zoom .

## A note from Sarah Cote Volunteer Coordinator

### Volunteer Support Meetings

**Lincoln** – Wednesday, October 12th CHCS in-person 3-4pm

**Bangor** – Wednesday, October 19th NLHCH in-person 6-7pm & 7-8pm (ten folks per session max)

*\*please note that this is subject to change in which case meetings will be online.*



## A note from Jane Cornman Bereavement Coordinator

### Thursday Morning Drop-In Grief Support Meetings

Bangor area online grief support meetings continue on the first and third Thursdays of the month, 9-10:30 am. Upcoming meetings will take place on October 6 and 20 and November 3 and 17. People who are interested in attending or want more information should contact Jane Cornman (944-5534 or [jcornman@northernlight.org](mailto:jcornman@northernlight.org)).

## Volunteer Reviews for CEUs

### 1. "The Courage to Care: Being Fully Present with the Dying" by Linda Bryce, R.N. (2021)

The author sets this book up as a handbook for individuals considering sitting with those who are dying. Interspersed in her writing are individual family memories that help to instruct would be volunteers about the dying process. She also includes short exercises to assist volunteers understand what they may experience as they sit with the dying. She provides potential caregivers with ten guiding principles which include how to be present for the client during the process. Overall it is a common sense guide for any volunteer. Recommended by Deb D. (South Portland)

### 2. "Hospice Journeys: 25 Memorable Stories" by Laura Hyman, Hospice Volunteer (2018)

This is an extremely honest account of a newly trained hospice volunteer as she sat with her first hospice clients. It was a bit difficult to read as she struggles to learn her place as a volunteer for each individual. Of interest was her use of singing to and for clients as a way to ease them in the transition process. Recommended by Deb D. (South Portland)

### 3. "From Sun to Sun: A Hospice Nurse Reflects on the Art of Dying" by Nina McKissock (2015)

An exceptionally well written account of a hospice nurse's journey with twenty-one of her hospice patients who are transitioning. Her personal writing is absorbing, reflective and heart-warming. This book was inspiring to me as a hospice volunteer for the past nine years and I wholeheartedly recommend it to any volunteer in the hospice field. Recommended by Deb D. (South Portland)

### 4. "The Measure of Our Days- New Beginnings at Life's End" by Jerome Groopman, MD

Dr. Groopman is one of the world's leading researchers in AIDS and cancer. He tells the stories of eight patients facing death. A medical case study of each patient is presented as well as their spiritual journey into self-awareness. The courage and endurance of Dr. Groopman's patients gives him hope and strength when death is near, along with modern science and faith. Recommended by Jane W. (South Portland)

## Reflection

What was your experience with your first friend & What did you learn that was unexpected?

We invite you to share your thoughts with your region's volunteer coordinator for future publication in Volunteer Newsletters.

## Fun Fact

In 1831 Samuel Francis Smith wrote the lyrics for "America" (My Country 'Tis of Thee) and set the melody to the United Kingdoms National Anthem "God Save the King". The use of the same melody as the British royal anthem can be described as a contrafactum which reworks this symbol of British monarchy to make a statement about American democracy.

Garraty, John A. & Carnes, Mark C., eds. (1999). American National Biography. Vol. 20. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 281.