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Ministry Profile:

**Helping Hand
Grief Support**

Helping Hand Grief Support



"With the trauma of finding my 22-year-old daughter in her bed, passed away from an unknown heart condition, I wanted to crawl in a cave and not ever come out," shared Dolores Humphrey.

The founders of Helping Hand Grief Support, George and Wanda Stein, met with Dolores and told her she had a choice to make. She could either go on living or just survive.

"They promised to help me learn to live again and be open to joy in my life — all of which my daughter, Breanne, would want for me," Dolores explained. "Attending Helping Hand has given me just that. I've been educated on what grief is, so the fear that I'm going crazy is defused. I've also been given the support and ideas to use to honor my daughter and, most importantly, a growing faith and hope that brings me peace even in the midst of tremendous pain."

IN 1992, Helping Hand Grief Support was founded by George and Wanda Stein after they experienced the loss of their only child, John. "I do believe our son, John, would be proud that we took the tragedy of his passing and used it to help others in their time of loss," said Wanda. "I know where John is. He was delivered to Heaven the night he died. John is with God, and God has been with me and George through it all. My favorite song is 'I Surrender All.' Every time I hear it, I think of how I surrendered my child, my will, my life, and my time to be used by God for His purposes."

Originally the Helping Hand Grief Support group was established to help parents in the Cherry Hill area who also had lost a child. People started hearing about the group, and adults who had suffered other kinds of losses wanted to attend

the meetings, too. George and Wanda decided to open it up to individuals who had experienced all types of losses. "We started to receive people that had death by suicide," explained Wanda. "They wanted their own night and group because of the complicated grief issues involved in their losses. So, we opened up another night for meetings on the fourth Monday of the month for Death by Suicide. Then people requested we meet weekly and we honored the request."

Helping Hand Grief Support meetings are held on Monday evenings throughout the year from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. "The meetings are an 'open format' and there are no costs associated with the ministry," George said. "All books, handouts, personal journals, and course materials are provided. The church provides the environment for healing with state of the art projection and audio systems as well as



breakout classrooms for support groups.”

George believes one of the unique features of this program involves the number of male participants. He shared, “Normally very few males attend this type of support group. We have a very large weekly percentage of male participants. In addition, we offer a once a month support group for male issues only.”

The first hour of the meetings is an instructional time for all the participants. The goal of the instructional segment is to address areas the grieving person experiences from the beginning of their grief journey to helping them find a new normal and purpose in their life.

The new people are taken to a room where they’re given a chance to share their stories and discover what they can get from the meetings. Then they are back to the meeting to hear the topic being taught for everyone. Some topics include “Finding your New Normal,” “Anger & Grief,” “Forgiveness,” and “Guilt.”

The educational component is presented by George Stein and Dr. Dennis Borg. “I present the educational component six to eight times a year,” explained Dr. Borg. “I also participate with George in a question and answer period at the end of each course. George and Wanda also refer people to me from time to time for individual grief counseling.”

Dr. Borg continuously depends on God as he prepares for his role in the ministry. He added, “I always pray about both the presentations that I do and the counseling sessions I’m involved in. I pray that God will give me discernment and sensitivity so that I can minister to those who are hurting.”

“The dedicated people in this ministry all feel a calling from God to educate, comfort, and support those who are grieving the loss of a loved one,” explained George. “I personally feel called to minister to those grieving no matter what their faith is (or is not) or their religious affiliation. God’s call is to provide resources and an environment to help them heal.”

The second hour of the meeting is a support component. Individuals meet in separate rooms for group sessions related to the type of death they have experienced. George added, “Support group facilitators lead the group discussions. The participants are blended with other grievers who are further along in their journey and with those who can offer love, support, hope, and

encouragement.”

God is working in various ways through this ministry. “There are a number of volunteers involved, and almost all of them have come through the ministry,” said Dr. Borg. “All volunteers have experienced major losses. This is a necessary prerequisite for involvement. Grief is one of those areas that you need to have personal experience to effectively minister to others.”

Participants, Dennis and Janice DiBerardine, are grateful for the ministry and its leaders. They added, “The Helping Hand Grief Support group was and still is instrumental in the healing process of our grief journey after the suicide of our only child. It’s one of the few support groups which has the resources to effectively meet the needs of suicide survivors and other human losses. Helping Hands Grief Support is a blessing for those who are grieving as the result of significant losses in their lives.”

Patricia Block joined the ministry three weeks after her husband died. “Without Helping Hand Grief Support, I would still be deep into my grief,” shared Patricia. “I love the people. We share, laugh, cry, and help each other.”

Patricia had the opportunity to serve in the grief ministry’s first dinner social in December. She said, “Every Monday evening we share the FAC facility with the Free and Fifty Ministry in one room and Helping Hand Grief Support in the other room. We never have a chance to mingle with the other group. Ed Brokhoff of Free & Fifty came to us and asked if we would be interested in doing a group Christmas Dinner. We jumped at the suggestion. The goal was to help meet the needs of the hurting during the holidays and help the people in the grief ministry transition into feeling more comfortable to participate in other ministries at FAC.

Ed said, “The grief ministry supports the community and is a wonderful outreach. We wanted to help the people in the grief ministry take the next step in finding more ways to become involved at church.”

Faith Stiles, another volunteer who’s involved in Free and Fifty, felt called to serve at the dinner

social, too. She added, “My job was to get a team of workers to do setups for the dinner and decorations. The purpose of the dinner was to show love to others going through a hard time. I personally felt the love and met wonderful, dear people.”

A great number of people attended the Christmas Dinner Social. George, Wanda, Dr. Borg, and the whole ministry were amazed at how beautiful the evening was.

“It was very nice to have an evening together and talk about fun things and life,” shared Patricia. “It gave our group a chance to make new friends.”

Helping Hand Grief Support continues to grow and needs prayer. “We are seeing between 75 and 95 people per evening, and we’re growing,” explained George. “We are now a referral for the Philadelphia and New Jersey Veteran’s Administration as a grief support resource for the families of our military soldiers who have committed suicide.” ■

To learn more about Helping Hand Grief Support and/or to find out ways you can help, call the church at 609-953-7333, x309 or visit <http://helpinghandgriefsupport.org>.

