

August 5, 2011

Dear Friends of Kara,

We sit in a circle on the cool cabin floor – eight little boys and three counselors. Six boys are living today with the death of their fathers – four to illness, one to suicide, one to murder. One recently attended the funerals of two grandparents. For the youngest camper, this is a safe place to mourn the death of his mom. As the talking stick is passed from one small hand to another, they share.

- *“My daddy was shot.”*
- *“My dad killed his self.”*
- *“My grandfather died from diabetes – but not everyone does. Then my grandma died.”*
- *“My mommy died from cancer.”*
- *“My dad was sick for a long time and then he died.”*
- *“My daddy died when he went to the hospital.”*
- *“I wish my dad didn’t have that accident.”*
- *“My daddy died when he stopped breathing.”*

It’s easy to think that the sadness of such sharing must be overwhelming, but it is not. It is difficult. Meaningful. Heart-wrenching, and yet hopeful, life-affirming. The hope comes in very large doses over the next two days as these same boys swing seamlessly between grief work and the extraordinary work of play. One minute they are making masks to show their feelings. Then, it’s on to the pool, rock climbing, foosball. At the campfire these youngest campers file up to the stage saying the name of the person who died and how they died. They place their candles along the ledge of the stage and return to seats where moments ago they laughed at silly skits. It is in these campfire seats that they relax into their grief – knowing now, by experience, that it comes in waves and will recede again. They snuggle on our laps or turn to catch a glance of understanding. They whisper, *“Cancer. Cancer again. And again.”* They listen with respect as each of the nearly 80 campers and dozens of counselors continue the parade of candlelight.

It is one of our six year olds who steps up first to share a story. He wants us to know that he used to do art and read books with his mom, that she was from Ireland and that he misses her. And he whispers, *“I wonder if she hears me now.”* As older children and teens follow, he sees what he may not yet understand, that he is not alone and that speaking about the memories and the missing helps.

This is Kara Camp Erin, an experience that provides the equivalent of six months of grief group work in a single weekend. For too many this is the only chance they will have to address their grief. The changes in their families, financial challenges, simple demands of scheduling make it impossible to participate in a regular bi-weekly program. .

As we wind down this fiscal year on September 30, your generous support can ensure that programs such as Camp Erin continue, that we are able to respond to the call from local schools when a death in the school community impacts the circles of families, teachers, staff

and neighbors. Your gift of \$100, \$1000 or whatever amount is comfortable will make a difference to people of all ages that Kara helps every day. And making your gift before September 30 will be greatly appreciated.

Since 1976, Kara has provided support to individuals, families and groups when someone has died or when a death is anticipated. We know this work makes an enormous difference – we know it because as staff and volunteers we, ourselves, have benefited. We see the difference in clients who come into the office bent by grief and later return to volunteer as peer counselors, as camp counselors.

I know this work is essential and that the results can be transformative. I know that doing this work can reshape one's life – it did just that for me. As I sit with my clients – a parent whose child died by suicide, a woman whose sister was murdered, a son whose father died after a prolonged illness, a father who lost a child, a woman anticipating the death of a parent, a husband whose wife died unexpectedly, a class whose teacher has died – I see the pain, and yet know the possibilities. I remember the pain and know that while it never goes away, it can be moved into a place that is familiar and safe, that it can be reshaped into empathy and understanding. It is not a talisman against future pain of loss, but it can inform a meaningful transition.

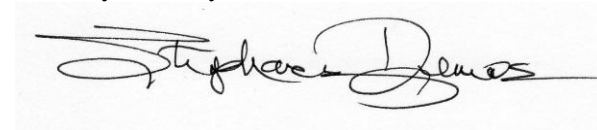
I know that this work is not possible without the generous support of our donors. Kara does not receive government funding. We rely on the generosity of individuals and foundations. We do not charge for peer support services – one-on-one counseling and grief groups for adults, youth and teen groups, Camp Erin. We do not wait when a crisis occurs. We show up.

So far, this fiscal year, since October 1, 2010, your contributions have enabled us to:

- train 24 new peer support counselors,
- offer 71 clients grief-related therapy for a total of 859 service hours,
- host 394 individuals in 19 grief groups for a total of 3220 service hours,
- deliver 66.5 service hours of crisis response, and
- play a leadership role in Project Safety Net since its inception as a community coalition responding to the cluster of local teen suicides.

We ask you to support this incredible organization that supports our community. **We ask you to give a gift by September 30, 2011**, an investment in a vital service – an investment that helps to provide a safety net for our community today and well into the future. Your gift is an endorsement for what we do and tells others – individuals, corporations, foundations – that what we do matters.

The very best to you,



Stephanie Demos
Development Director and Peer Support Counselor
Kara Camp Erin Counselor (Maple Cabin)

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P.S. If the company you or your spouse work for has a matching gifts program, please let us know and we can provide the company with the information that will allow your gift to be doubled. Every gift makes a difference. Every gift is appreciated.

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