

# The SB 355 Grief Support Trust Account Final Report 2018

## Background

In March of 2018 The Solace Tree received \$5,500 from the SB 355 Grief Support Trust Account. One of our programs – The Good Grief Project, provided support to children and teens, ages 5 to 17 in the schools who are dealing with ALL loss. We also worked with those children’s and teens’ parents and caregivers. This program in the schools has given students tools to cope with the challenge of loss and unexpected change in three key areas of their lives: 1) family – divorce, alcoholism, drug addiction, step-families, and incarceration; 2) personal – experience of a death, stress, anger, low self-esteem, chronic sadness; and 3) social – grief, conflict, and communication.

Specific topics included:

- Living in a single parent home due to drugs or alcohol
- Living apart from an incarcerated parent
- Suicide
- Experiencing loss and change to ALL loss
- Managing anger responsibly
- Coping with grief due to death

With more than 10 years of helping children and teens in schools deal with loss—especially loss from death—the Solace Tree staff, volunteers, and interns use their training and expertise to help students deal with the emotional strife caused by divorce, death, cancer, and incarceration, just to name a few.

Children and teens in our program—The Good Grief Project—benefit from learning how to self-manage emotions and how to reach out to others for help. Building awareness and skills help them deal more effectively in areas of self-esteem, stress management, and social skills development. The Good Grief Project helps students learn about themselves and others while enhancing their abilities to formulate and express their thoughts and feelings.

## Funding

Our program—**The Solace Tree/Good Grief Project**—was granted **\$5,500.00** for art and craft supplies and programming. Here is the funding breakout for fund use:

Salary	\$2,250.00
Art and craft supplies	\$500.00
Canvases for painting	\$250.00
Insurance	\$300.00
Travel	\$350.00
Supplies for training interns and volunteers	\$350.00
National Background Checks for interns and volunteers	\$250.00
Rent and programming	<u>\$1,250.00</u>
Total	<b>\$5,500.00</b>

### Nine Schools were Visited During The Good Grief Projects 2018 spring and summer School Year

Double Diamond Elementary, Caughlin Ranch Elementary, Sepulveda Elementary, Verdi Elementary, Elmcrest Elementary, Spanish Springs Elementary, Sarah Winnemucca Elementary, Mendive Middle, and Spanish Springs High School(s) were visited during the 2018 academic year.

### Assessment

The Good Grief Project currently tracks and measures the effectiveness of programs in schools and on our campus by surveying the students, teachers, and family members who have participated in the program.

### Student Participation

	Dominant Culture	Minority
Girls	81	
Boys	44	
Total	125	64

### Type of Loss

Death of a parent	49 (1)
Death of a sibling	10
Death of a grandparent	13 (3)
Divorce	28 (2)
Cancer/Illness/Disease	7
Incarceration	11
Other (Deployed, Separation, Deportation)	7

### Summary of surveys from students, teachers, families, and volunteers

According to the Good Grief Project evaluations, the Executive Director “showed comprehensive knowledge in the area of grief and loss” and exhibited “high quality group facilitations skills.” The Executive Director, volunteers, and interns consistently demonstrated sensitivity to the developmental stages of the students in the grieving process.

Time and again in student and family evaluations, sessions in the Good Grief Project were lauded as “safe,” a place where young and old “could express feelings openly.” Participants believed this helped them break through the isolation of loss. Further, all said they learned different ways in which to feel the pain of loss, express it, find constructive outlets for anger and sadness, and find ways to reach out to help others. The group fostered a unity that allowed participants to reach out to one another for comfort and

help. Two other much mentioned comments were 1) the understanding that this was a volunteer organization; however, 2) they were disappointed that groups could not meet more frequently and/or through the summer. Teachers uniformly felt supported and better able to be of use to students experiencing major loss in their lives due to death, divorce, incarceration, or deployment of a parent.

### Conclusion

Death and loss are a part of life that have a tremendous impact on all lives, especially the lives of our young people. Our fast-paced culture does not always have venues in which our children and teens can learn to deal with these situations. We do know that if young people do not acquire basic coping skills to integrate these life issues at the time they happen, student achievement, appropriate behavior, emotional and psychic growth will be negatively impacted.

Negative impact is countered with positive action and *your generous donation* has had an important and positive impact on the children and teens in the Good Grief Project as shown in the evaluation above. Further, the continued growth and success of this program has helped promote this program and the presence of the Solace Tree – The Good Grief Project. Enhancing the lives of our young people enhances the life of our community—not only the community of Washoe county, but of our nation, and of our world.

### Counselor Evaluations

Last year, some of our students in our school had experienced tremendous loss. We had anything from suicide, to unexpected deaths and even very ugly divorces. Even though I am a school counselor, I am not super comfortable when it comes to running grief groups. Emilio graciously came to our school to help co-facilitate a group for these students, and the results were outstanding. Not only did these students have a safe place to tell their stories and unleash some private feelings, but they realized they were not alone. Emilio helped these students feel comfortable enough to share some very personal stories to strangers. I would never have been able to do what Emilio did for these kids, and in the process, I learned some skills and strategies to help our students in the future. Meg – School Counselor

I would like to write a few words of gratitude for having Emilio Parga come to my school to run his Good Grief Group with my students. As a school counselor, I was not comfortable with addressing grief in a group setting. Having Emilio at my side allowed me the opportunity to step into a place of discomfort and insecurity. I quickly realized that running a grief group was not nearly as intimidating as I at first thought. Our students look forward to group, and the teachers at my school are very receptive to their students leaving the classroom for this valuable support. Our number of students in need of this type of group continues to grow, and my fellow school counselor and I both feel confident to create more groups in the next week or so. I am very thankful that Spanish Springs ES was chosen to work with Emilio so that grief can be appropriately addressed with our students in a school setting. Trudie – School Counselor

**CR Elementary: February 2018.**

What can you say to someone who experiences death, loss?

“You’re not alone.”

“I have a similar problem.”

“I’m here to listen.”

“It’s not your fault.”

**Hardest Thing:** Trying to forget what happened.

**Most Helpful:** Talk about it, crying, punch pillows, talk to God.

**E Elementary: March 2018.**

“Sometimes I feel trapped like this dog in a cage.”

“I’m in this group because my mommy died. My mommy had purple dots on her legs. They purpled on my mommy’s heart.” –Zyla

“My dog Pepsi died by getting hit by a car, my dad Ernesto died by shooting himself.” – Anthony

“I’m here because two of my family members died and my parents divorced. One died cause she had a bad heart and the other was old.” –Iris

“My grandparents died and my parents divorced, they looked for someone else to marry.” –Kyle

“My mom and dad were yelling and my dad put my brother in a laundry room and turned off the lights. My mom yelled at my dad and said she would leave him if he did it again. My dad accidentally did it again and so my mom yelled and left him. I was in the crib.” - Kyle

“My family member who had a bad heart, we used to go to the river and jump off a cliff.” - Iris

“I used to play sports and ride bikes and quads with my dad” –Anthony

**DD Elementary: April 2018**

“I miss my grandma’s dog the most. My grandma was 98 years old when she died. My dog is like my grandpa when I cry. He comforts me. He is my therapy dog.” –Katrina

“I lost my grandma and my dad. My dad died from drugs. He was always sick. I could see him take the drugs. I miss my dad’s laugh the most.” –Avery

What would you say if you could speak to your loved one?

“Even if you were sad you shouldn’t have taken the medical things to take your life.” – Avery

**CR Elementary: May 2018**

“All my tears are sucked out of me.” “When I get mad I scream into my pillow.” – Sabrina

“I get mad when my family listens to my sister but not me.” -Cameron

Keith (dad) shot himself, “It sounded like a soap bar hitting the bath tub.” –Hailey

“My dad had a stroke a year ago. We watched Cinderella at the movies when we got home he laid on the floor and never got up. He died a day after my brother’s birthday.” - Austin

“I have some advice for you Austin. Celebrate his life because with a death, life creates a new beginning and a new life is a time to celebrate.” -Sabrina



CELEBRATING  
 2003 ~ 15 Years ~ 2018  
 OF SUPPORTING GRIEVING CHILDREN, TEENS, AND ADULTS

Over the last 15 years, the Solace Tree has provided grief support to nearly 6,500 children, 2,500 teens, and 3,000 adults who have suffered a devastating or traumatic experience through death, divorce, abuse, addiction, depression, deployment, bullying, school shootings, mass shootings, incarceration, deportation, foster care, separation, cancer, illness, and disease. Along the way, approximately 400 volunteers, school counselors, teachers, nurses, and social workers have worked over 150,000 hours to help support the Solace Tree. A special thank you to the many businesses, foundations, and funeral homes, for supporting us too. We want you to know how grateful we are to everyone, including our dedicated board members, for their time, talent, and resources and it is only because of your generosity and support that we are still here, 15 years later!

**GOOD GRIEF PROJECT**

For the past 7 years, the Good Grief Project has conducted programs in over 24 schools within the Washoe County District. This district provides K-12 to 104 schools with over 64,000 children with growing needs. The Good Grief Project believes that healing from grief is not just important for the bereaved, it is important for the entire community. The Good Grief Project serves as a preventative program, working with children and teens to explore, experience and verbalize the hard feelings and thoughts that they are coping with. By providing a safe and healthy outlet for these feelings and thoughts, participants will be able to address unresolved issues of loss, with the end result being that they will become healthy and thriving members of their community.

**Due to lack of school funds, this program relies heavily on the generosity and support of private donors.**

**GRIEF GROUPS**

- Families attend from cities such as: Reno, Carson City, Gardnerville, Lake Tahoe, Elko, Fallon, Fernley, Sparks, Sacramento, Auburn, Truckee, and Susanville, CA
- Facilitated grief groups for clients from over 12 different cultures and 7 different religions
- Co-found 4 grief centers in Nevada and 1 in New York
- Created a special suicide grief support group for teens
- Specializing in explaining death and dying to children
- Specializing in explaining suicide to children

**GRIEF SUPPORT**

- Worked with 347 children through Kids Can Cope, a group intervention designed to help children and teenagers who currently have a parent diagnosed with cancer, illness, and disease
- Volunteered for the U.S. Military – Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors
- Provided 10 summer grief camps at Lake Tahoe
- Held annual Child and Teen Grief Awareness Day which is the third Thursday of every November
- Grief support for pre-schools and private schools
- Grief support for Businesses and organizations

**PRESENTATION & LECTURES**

- Keynote speaker and presenter at national conferences, including: American Academy of Pediatrics, National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association for the Education of Young Children, Cancer Treatment Center of America and American Counseling Association
- Speaker at various children's hospitals and hospices around the nation
- Provided grief workshops for health care, social services and education professionals on both "Grief in the Workplace", "Helping Children and Teens Cope with Loss and Death" and "Explaining Death to Children"
- Lecturer on "Death and Dying" and "How to Help Children and Teens Cope with Death and Loss" at the University of Nevada, Reno

**RECOGNITION**

- PBS Silver Communicator
- Health Care Heroes
- Entrepreneur Award 2010
- Human Services Network
- Agency of the Year 2016
- Ordinary People, Extraordinary
- Measures Award 2014
- Truckee Meadows Tomorrow
- Silver Star Award 2007

**PUBLICATIONS**

The Solace Tree has published seven different grief books and journals which have sold over 30,000 copies nationally and internationally.

**MAGAZINES**

Featured in **BabyZone.com (now babble.com)**, **Parents.com**, **Family Pulse**, **Reno Gazette-Journal**, and **University of Phoenix Alumni**

THE SOLACE TREE IS RECOGNIZED AS A PUBLIC CHARITY AND HAS 501(c)3 STATUS AND ALL DONATIONS ARE DEDUCTIBLE  
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To Whom It May Concern,

My life imploded in an instant on March 21, 2015. My husband suicided after years of struggling with depression. How do I tell our 10-year old daughter that her father intentionally chose to leave us? Am I capable of picking up the pieces and continuing on with life?

Soon after my husband's death, my daughter and I were engulfed in grief. We both needed support in unique and individual ways. I embarked on a journey searching for guidance on how to survive a loss like ours.

By luck and by grace I stumbled onto the Solace Tree website. Without a doubt, the Solace Tree has been our solid rock in a churning, violent ocean. At the Solace Tree, bonds are formed beyond normal friendships. Each person has suffered a loss and desperately seeks comfort. Through the support group, our grief is validated and an unspoken understanding is felt. Sometimes we pour our hearts out, sometimes only listen. Sometimes we hold one another, sometimes we are the held.

The Solace Tree has been the catalyst for my daughter's growth and acceptance of her father's decision. Her grief work and my grief work have been starkly different. Being with children her own age, all grieving the loss of a significant loved one whether it's a mother, father, brother, sister or pet, a connection of the soul emerges. The feelings of sadness, anguish and heartache are normal emotions of grief. At the Solace Tree, my daughter has children traveling the same path as her; peers she can talk to about losing her father in a trusting environment.

Emilio and his staff have provided a refuge for my daughter and me. Out of this heart-wrenching tragedy, we have been richly blessed to be surrounded by a support network called the Solace Tree. The service provided by this organization is like no other – it is truly priceless. I shutter to think of where our lives would be without the support, understanding, encouragement and kindness that the Solace Tree has bestowed upon us. We will be eternally grateful.

Thank you, Robin



# News Release

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For Immediate Release

DRAFT

XXXX day, Sept. X, 2018

## Community Partners to Host Sept. 27 Workshops on How to Support Children Affected by 1 October, Trauma and Loss

Clark County, the Nevada Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Vegas Strong Resiliency Center and community partners invite parents, teachers and professionals who work with children to attend a free workshop on **Thursday, Sept. 27**, to learn about ways to help children cope with effects from 1 October and other causes of trauma and loss.

The workshop, entitled "Supporting Children After Crisis and Loss – One Year Later" will focus on how to support children who may be impacted by the 1 October shooting, its anniversary and other experiences of crisis and loss in their lives. The keynote speaker is Dr. David Schonfeld, a national expert on helping children deal with crisis and loss. The workshop is being offered twice on Sept. 27. Due to limited seating capacity, participants are asked to register for the session they want to attend through the online links provided below:

- **10 a.m. to 12 p.m.**, Clark County Government Center Commission Chambers, 500 Grand Central Parkway, 89155, in downtown Las Vegas:  
<https://1-october-anniversary-morning-session.eventbrite.com> (This session will be recorded by Clark County Television for later rebroadcast on CCTV and the County's YouTube site)
- **5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.** at the New York Life Insurance Company office, 6325 S. Rainbow Blvd., 89118:  
<https://1-october-anniversary-evening-session.eventbrite.com>

Dr. Schonfeld is a developmental-behavioral pediatrician and director of the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement, [www.schoolcrisiscenter.org](http://www.schoolcrisiscenter.org), based at the University of Southern California. He has authored many articles and books on crisis and loss related to children, and has provided consultation and training on school crisis and pediatric grief in the aftermath of numerous school shootings, crisis events and disasters in the United States and abroad, including providing advice to schools in our community following the Route 91 festival shooting. His workshops are being sponsored by the Nevada Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the New York Life Insurance Company in cooperation with Clark County, the Vegas Strong Resiliency Center, the Clark County School District, and Adam's Place, a grief center for families and children in Las Vegas.

"The Vegas Strong Resiliency Center is dedicated to helping everyone affected by 1 October build strength and resiliency in the aftermath of such a violent event, including our kids," said Clark County Assistant County Manager Kevin Schiller, who oversees the Vegas Strong Resiliency Center. "We welcome Dr. Schonfeld to our community, and hope parents and professionals gain some insights into supporting children who may be coping with trauma related to the shooting or anxiety because the incident occurred here."

-More-

"We welcome the opportunity to host these workshops in our community," said Dr. Pam Greenspon, a Las Vegas pediatrician and Vice President of the Nevada Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. "Children and families have been impacted by 1 October in a variety of ways. The day after the shooting I had children in my office who were afraid to go to school, and some of their parents were afraid to send them. Some children never speak about the shooting and don't think they have been impacted. Others live with a baseline anxiety that they can be shot anytime or anywhere in the United States."

With the approach of the 1 October anniversary, some insights Dr. Schonfeld recommends to help parents support children include:



- The anniversary may cause children to experience fear, anxiety and other feelings they felt around the time of the shooting and/or remind them of a loss or injury of someone they knew or loved.
- Consider limiting the amount of coverage on television or other media (including internet and social media) about the anniversary, especially if it involves any graphic or emotional material.
- Children may not tell their parents or other adults that they have times when they are feeling upset or worried because they may be embarrassed about these feelings or do not want to upset their parents.
- Invite children to talk with you about what is bothering them. It is, though, generally not recommended to force them to talk (unless you are concerned that they may hurt themselves or others or are otherwise placing themselves in danger). Remain available and present, but wait for them to accept the invitation.
- Share your concerns and feelings and how you cope with them. Many children and adults are still having reactions to the shooting. They may appear to be "back to normal" but still – at times – be feeling sad, scared, anxious or angry. Help them learn how to cope with distress by sharing different strategies such as talking to someone you trust, expressing your feelings in writing, or healthy distraction such as exercise.
- Provide appropriate reassurance, but don't give false reassurance. If they have realistic concerns, help children learn to deal with the uncertainty and fear, rather than try to pretend that the concerns are unrealistic.
- Remind children of ways that you, school staff, and others in the community are doing everything possible to keep them safe.
- You can help your children prepare for commemorative activities that will take place in school and the community by having discussions with them at home ahead of time.
- You may wish to speak with your children's teacher, social worker, or school counselor; pediatrician; or mental health professional for advice or if you have concerns.
- Let your child's school know if you don't feel your children should participate in a memorial or commemorative event that is being held at school.
- Don't wait until you think your children need counseling – take advantage of counseling and support whenever you think it will be helpful. Contact the Vegas Strong Resiliency Center for resource referrals at [www.VegasStrongRC.org](http://www.VegasStrongRC.org).
- Some signs of distress to look for include:
  - Sadness or depressed or irritable mood
  - Anxiety or fears
  - Problems with attention or new or worsening academic difficulties
  - Changes in behavior
  - Social isolation or withdrawal from friends or activities that were previously enjoyed
  - Changes in appetite or sleep
  - Physical complaints such as feeling tired, headaches, or stomach aches
  - Acting less mature; having trouble getting along with friends or family members
  - New onset or increase in use of alcohol, tobacco, or drugs
  - Risky behaviors

###

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