School busses are beginning to appear on the roads and days are becoming shorter, marking the impending fall season. Having just completed volunteer training for nine fantastic new volunteer facilitators, we are forming new groups for our participants in preparation for a mid-September program start, and taking a moment to reflect back on another fun-filled, uplifting Camp Charlie experience.

For those of us who organized and ran camp this past June, the most likely word that comes to mind when describing Camp Charlie is “wet!” For the first time in many years, the weather did not cooperate in providing conditions conducive for “fun in the sun.” Still, each day, campers and volunteers alike showed up to camp ready for another day of thoughtful grief activities, bonding with those who truly understand one another, and laughter and friendship in mud and rain. When Carnival Day, often a camp highlight, was accompanied by a torrential downpour for its duration, campers and buddies accepted calmly the disappointment of an unusable moon bounce, soggy popcorn and watery sno cones. As is often the case, we who run Safe Harbor were reminded by those we serve, of how amazing and RESILIENT these children and teens truly are. A bit of rain was not going to dampen their experience. Having been through some of the worst of times, they show us, time and again, that we can heal, we can support and help one another, we can find new hope, and a little rain falls on us all every now and again.

And so, this newsletter is dedicated to resilience. We hope to show it is a learnable skill, to let our readers see it in action through our Camp Charlie experience, and also demonstrate how those who support this program help spread this important skill to our families through the work we do. It is an ongoing honor to be part of the Safe Harbor community and the lessons learned from our participants’ courage, humility and strength are lifelong gifts we can all cherish.

The results are in...

When looking back at our most recent programming year, it is important to gauge how effective Safe Harbor is in making a difference as we strive to help our families with their grief. To that end, at the conclusion of each year, surveys are distributed to all participants. Following are the results of these surveys:

Parent Evaluations:
- I feel less alone: 97%
- I feel less anxious: 81%
- I can focus more at work/home: 93.5%
- I enjoy spending time with others more than before: 92.5%
- I feel better equipped to talk to my children about their grief: 95%
- It is easier to talk about my own grief: 95%
- I feel more hopeful about the future: 92%

Child/ Teen Evaluations:
- I feel less alone: 90.5%
- I feel less scared: 88%
- I can focus more at school: 80.5%
- I enjoy spending time with my friends more than before: 88%
- It is easier to talk to my family about the death: 83%
- I feel more hopeful about the future: 95%
CAMP CHARLIE 2019: Traveling the World to Explore Grief

What a challenging and exciting 13th year of Camp Charlie this has been! With our theme of “World Explorers”, we led 41 young campers and 15 teen buddies around the world, as they explored grief traditions from various regions while participating in music, art, stations and mindfulness activities at College Settlement Campus. This year we had a large turnout from the community, with 63% of our campers being non-Safe Harbor families. We are thrilled that we were able to provide a safe space for those who cannot attend our regular programming to share memories and thoughts about their special person who died.

We were excited to see new faces turn from trepidation, to smiles, to wonderment as they learned they were not alone in their loss, and they could have fun! Twenty-one volunteers and five staff led the groups and activities despite the mud and the marsh. Rain was not going to dampen anyone’s spirits! Each morning our campers had a wonderful time getting their passport stamped at each new activity and region. Afternoons were filled with fun in the sun... and rain! Despite a drenching carnival day, our campers still enjoyed water ice, warm popcorn, sand art, and airbrush tattoos. Water play day found the campers zooming down a large water slide and enjoying soft serve ice cream! College Settlement’s obstacle course and Briar Bush’s animal presentation helped round out our afternoon fun.

During their morning activities, campers had an opportunity to learn about Irish wakes and write Irish songs in music. At Stations, campers traveled to Guatemala where they created worry dolls, shared worries with one another, and learned they are not alone in their worries and fears. They then took to the skies as they sent messages to their loved ones by decorating and flying kites, as they do each year at the Guatemalan kite festival.

“Thank you so much for such a meaningful camp. This has truly been a great experience that has allowed our child to grieve in a more positive manner. Continue to be great with the program. We can see the change already in our child.”

Traveling to India and Asia, campers practiced mindfulness and found some inner peace through calming techniques. They created self-soothing hand labyrinths and shared what makes them feel overwhelmed or angry and how to handle those feelings.

While at art, each camper and buddy created his or her very own grief country. They shared their personal grief path as a map, invented a country motto for encouragement, a country flower, and finally a country flag to represent what gives them hope.

This year at Camp Charlie we introduced a camp-wide service project in which each camper and buddy participated. We believe that in order to grieve and heal in a healthy manner, one must learn to help others. By doing so, they are reinvesting in life and finding a new purpose. Each day, campers and...
buddies, with the help of our volunteers, made special bonding squares for “Today is a Good Day”, a program which provides parents of very ill newborns specially woven squares to wear and then share with their babies as a means of passing on their scent for comfort when the babies are in an incubator. The campers were especially proud to present over 50 new bonding squares at the close of camp.

“My son lost his dad on Feb 1st. Being involved with Safe Harbor and Camp Charlie has been an amazing experience. I can see that he felt supported and understood in this group and he looks forward to coming to this camp every day. Thank you so much for providing such an amazing experience to these little kids.”

At our Family Gathering held on the last day of camp, we remembered, with family and friends, the special people who have brought our campers together. When the name of their loved one was called, family members walked up to a large mountain and planted their camper’s flag of hope! Each year our team of volunteers somehow manages to out-do the last in creativity and purpose. If you are interested in more information about our no-cost bereavement camp for your family, please contact us. Registration begins each year in February.

“My child loves Camp Charlie. Enjoys the friendly atmosphere, the focus on teamwork and working together. Enjoys the sense of fellowship formed by the shared bond between peers.”

“He loved it and said it’s the best camp he’s ever been to.”
Thank you to our donors who specifically requested that their funds go toward our "Singer Resource Library". We are thrilled to offer so many great books, DVDs, CDs, and activities to our families. All of our resources address grief and loss, as well as feelings, resiliency, worries, fears, parenting a grieving child, and many more. If you have a book you would like to donate please reach out to Michelle or Kate at the main Safe Harbor number 215-481-5983 or by email at Safeharbor@jefferson.edu.

After a yearlong fundraising effort, the Moreland Auxiliary proudly contributed $12,000 to Camp Charlie.
“Kids are naturally resilient.” How many times have you heard someone say that? Well, as it turns out, resilience is not always a natural skill. In fact, resilience is something that can be learned and strengthened through practice. What does it really mean to be resilient? In the context of Safe Harbor it means acknowledging loss, managing the many thoughts and emotions that follow, and accepting support from others.

Step one is developing an awareness of emotions in our bodies. For example, the youngest group might discuss feeling like a storm cloud or like a volcano. Where in their bodies do they feel this anger or worry? What can they do to relax their bodies and help overwhelming feelings pass? There are as many ideas for this as there are children who attend Safe Harbor. Some exercise, some meditate, others journal, play music, or play video games, while some simply talk it out, or do various forms of art. All of these are great options as they are not harming others. The most important thing in practicing resilience is to be mindful of relaxing the body while doing one’s favorite activity.

Step two to build resilience is developing a growth mindset and positive thought pattern. One of the biggest benefits of attending a peer support group for participants is learning they are not the only ones having crazy thoughts in their heads. Others are very often feeling and thinking the same way. It is healing to have a worry or regret validated. Once a child or teen acknowledges their negative thought, they can work on changing it. Sometimes this is learning about self-affirmations. Sometimes it is just about adding the word “yet.” For example, “I can’t get out of bed every day—yet!” Some groups have practiced visualization of negative thoughts coming into their mind like a train, stopping at the station, but then leaving their mind to allow a positive thought train to come in. Just as with step one, this works best when the group participants are being mindful while doing their choice of activity.

Let’s say once a participant has steps one and two, they are now very adept at recognizing emotions in their body and managing negative thoughts. Good for them, they are almost there! Step three is gratitude. It is about allowing one’s self to receive help from others while showing gratitude. What better place to do this than in a peer support group setting? Group activities can help participants find hope in their new normal. They can learn to find positivity in their life while bonding with a new found support system.

“...resilience doesn’t have to be an empty or vague concept. In fact, decades of research have revealed a lot about how it works. This research shows that resilience is, ultimately, a set of skills that can be taught. ...It’s time we invest the time and energy to understand what “resilience” really means.”


Our volunteers received a special training this past spring on the use of creative arts to teach and foster resilience in bereaved children. This training was given by our music therapist and art specialist. We understand what an important role resiliency plays in everyone’s healing.
A lighthouse is a beacon, a light in the darkness for lost or weary travelers. We have chosen the lighthouse as the Safe Harbor logo. It represents our commitment to providing the bereaved with a safe place to feel supported and understood by others and hope for finding a light through the pain of their loss.

**Our 2019 Volunteer Class**

Front Row (L-R): Danielle Vasquez, Carol Chwal, Eileen Lashin, Stacey Goode.
Back Row (L-R): Julia Spoor, John Boylan III, Kelly Vesey, Lauren Vesey, Chuck Rudalavage.