



*Lynn Snyder.*

Lynn Snyder, LPC, ATR-BC, CT

Overwhelmed, alone, and petrified, those are just of a few of the emotions that I felt three years ago, when my husband Michael passed away at 31, leaving me as the sole parent of two young children. Despite an excellent family support system, I knew I needed to find help to ensure my children would be 'okay'. However, while there were support groups for widows, there were very few dedicated resources for families and those I did find were far away from where I lived in Ocean County.

But that was then and this is now. Thanks to Lynn Snyder, a very forward thinking and caring individual, help for children and their families is now easily accessible in the Jersey Shore area. Sensing a growing need for grief support services in the community, particularly after the death of 5 area teens who died by suicide, Lynn, a licensed counselor and a registered, board certified art therapist, decided to do something. Out of Lynn's passion, came Common Ground Grief Center, in Manasquan. Common Ground opened its doors in 2009.

"The loss of a loved one is difficult for everyone, but for children who have experienced the death of a parent or sibling, the effects can be devastating," says

Lynn. "For those children and their surviving parent, support and understanding is essential to their healing process."

With that in mind, The Center provides services, free of charge, for children 6 to 18 years of age, who have experienced the death of a parent, primary caregiver, sibling or friend. Whether the death occurred through an illness, accident, suicide, or murder, the ongoing peer support groups provide a safe and caring environment where individuals can begin the journey through their grief process.

Lynn, who has certification in Thanatology, the study of death, dying, and bereavement, chose the internationally known Dougy Center for Grieving Children and Families of Portland, Oregon as the model for Common Ground. The use of art, games, play and talking are incorporated in groups to assist children in coping with their grief. Parent/Guardian groups are run in conjunction with children's groups.

Lynn's attention to detail and thoughtfulness shows in all aspects of the Center. Groups are broken down by age and facilitated by dedicated and trained volunteers. The Center itself is located in a Victorian house that has the inviting feel of a home. This by far is not your typical meeting place. Besides

the relaxed décor, children's artwork adorns the walls, books and games fill the bookcases, and art supplies are a staple. A puppet stage, a hospital playroom and even an outside meditation garden complete this peaceful place of healing.

"Grief is a life-long process that gets revisited throughout one's life, hence groups at Common Ground our open ended support groups that allow children to decide if they want to attend, and when they are ready to leave the center", says Lynn. "This empowers the child, giving them a sense of control in a world that is usually turned upside down by a death in the family. It is also an opportunity to be with other children who have experienced similar loss so they learn they are not alone."

I wish the Center had existed for my family when Michael died. Perhaps, then I could have avoided the frustration and fear over lack of resources. I am so grateful that Lynn cared enough about her community to get involved so no other families have to go it alone through the grief process. Selfishly, I sleep better at night knowing that Lynn and Common Ground are only a phone call away for my children if and when they need it.