



pathfinders

you never have to walk alone

PATHFINDERS CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

Ten years ago, Cyndi McGinnis lost her 11-year-old daughter, Maggie, to cancer. At the time of Maggie's death, Cyndi and her husband, Jim, witnessed and endured the pain of losing their young daughter in the most courageous fight. There are no words for a loss like this; it's simply a tragedy.

Cyndi has discovered various means of healing along her grief journey. She finds comfort in another season with horses, a shared passion with Maggie. She recently organized a run as part of Miracles from Maggie, a non-profit the family established to raise money for families battling childhood cancer. When you meet Cyndi, you can feel right away what a brave and loving mother she is, not only to Maggie, but also to their other daughter Kenzie. The love she has for both of her children radiates from her soulful eyes and beautiful smile.



When Cyndi's friend, Dee, invited her to come on the Pathfinders Grief and Honor raft trip this past summer, Cyndi immediately said "yes." She knew this experience would take her beyond her comfort zone given that she had never set up a tent before, let alone been camping; but she said yes because she was ready to find some empowerment and a new sense of joy. She loved the idea of being on the Colorado River and allowing the water to do its healing work. She was nervous to go but was committed to finding herself amidst the discomfort of a new experience. From the outset, Cyndi thought her presence on the trip would be helpful to others with more recent losses; she never imagined the impact it would have on her own grief journey and the outcome was both beautiful and unexpected. Amid the peaceful water floats, the music therapy with Mack Bailey, and the nurturing meals, Cyndi let go of all responsibility and joined the group discussions about grief, signaling a shift inside her. After a long talk with trip leader, Allison Daily, her shift began to deepen even more. Grief often gets stuck, creating blocks within and for Cyndi, it wasn't until this experience that her 10 years of living with grief began to break down.

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FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Pathfinders Supporters,

I hope you all have enjoyed the beautiful fall weather and are gearing up for the holiday season! It is that time of year when life tends to get hectic and we wonder where the time went. We are all excited for the change of seasons, and with the snow beginning to fall, the hope of deep powder days is on the horizon.

For many people, the holiday season is fun and festive, yet for others, it can be an extremely challenging time. Those who are experiencing serious illness or deep grief often find this time of year to be overwhelming and even paralyzing. I always say that grief is complicated, especially around the holidays when the griever, coping with a broken heart, is surrounded by people that seem so happy and carefree. For those that are grieving, this time of year is a particularly stark reminder of the person in their lives that should be here but isn't. November through December is an exceptionally busy time for Pathfinders' counselors because they know this is a challenging time for many of our clients and they step up and walk through this time with them.

As you will read in this newsletter, Pathfinders continues to grow and expand at a rapid pace to best meet the needs of our community in which grief and illness are increasingly prevalent. I am so proud of all the good work the counselors are doing. Each day they show up for our clients with compassion, kindness, and incredible skill, holding space for deep pain. It is the time of year when we ask you to consider Pathfinders in your end-of-year giving. So, I would like to leave you with some reasons to put Pathfinders at the top of your giving list:

- Our School-Based Program has surpassed last year, nearly doubling the number of students we are serving this school year. The mental health crisis within the schools is alarming and Pathfinders is helping to give these children tools to deal with their losses from Covid (socially/emotionally) as well as other grief they are experiencing.
- This past summer we expanded our programming to include more opportunities for alternative therapy such as half-day grief retreats, sound healing, and equine therapy.
- We are experiencing a 40% increase in our adult and senior counseling programs for grief and illness.

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter and for your consideration in giving to support all of our programs.

*Best,
Allison Daily*



CLIENT SPOTLIGHT: CYNDI MCGINNIS

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When she returned from the raft trip, she took one of Allison's suggestions and wrote a letter to Maggie, committing to paper all of the memories and nightmares of Maggie's illness and death. An eight-page letter flowed out of her, just like the soothing river current. The letter marked a new, deeper level of healing for Cyndi. Like the river, things that had been stuck within her for a long time began to open and dislodge, allowing her to discover her own sense of self and empowerment. As she wrote the letter to Maggie in her journal, she tapped into Maggie's motto, "faith can crush fear!" Her fear found a new voice and point of release as it was replaced by love and honor. For Cyndi, the raft trip highlighted the power in witnessing the other griever's stories. She found she was not alone in this grief process and the pain that accompanied it. She felt comfort in being surrounded by and sharing with others she didn't know. On the river, she found herself. She discovered her grief in places that had been hidden and she learned she could hold her own pain differently, allowing the love to show through the darkness. Cyndi now knows she has the ability to find and celebrate Maggie in a new way, and that is the greatest gift of all.

—Allison Daily, Executive Director

PATHFINDERS BOARD MEMBER: BETH MOBILIAN

In 2008, while Beth Mobilian was working to attain a Master of Arts in Spiritual Psychology, a friend connected her with Kristin MacDermott, one of the co-founders of Pathfinders. Soon after, Beth joined the Pathfinders team, offering support to people, families, and caregivers living with cancer; sharing the tools for discovering how we use our challenges to grow; and making meaning with what happens in our lives. Beth was passionate about the Pathfinders curriculum, which encouraged clients to reflect and discover how resilience grows through life's challenges.

Several years after Beth was brought on, the Pathfinders model began to expand and grow through an offshoot endeavor and Beth shifted from her role at Pathfinders to program development at Reimagine, becoming a lead trainer for the research-proven curriculum. Her passion for this curriculum was steadfast, eventually leading her back to Pathfinders a number of years later to serve as a board member. She cherished the opportunity to return to Pathfinders' roots and stay involved with its growth locally.



Beth Mobilian

Beth finds meaning in the Pathfinders' mission that "you never have to walk alone." She sees Pathfinders as the vehicle for role-modeling how to be with each other through difficult times as a community, encouraging each of us to give and receive. Pathfinders serves as our guide, opening our hearts and showing up through it all. Beth particularly loves the Pathfinders Angels program, noting that "oftentimes our volunteers are those who have received, and now they are inspired to give back to others during their time of need. Pathfinders truly embodies community in this way and keeps the circle of giving and receiving flowing – growing the Angels in our community." Beth recognizes that working with Pathfinders throughout the years has been life-changing. She values the tenet that we grieve to the extent that we love and nurtures the belief that grief is a beautiful, yet painful, part of the human experience – an expression of our love.

Many years ago, Beth had a Pathfinders client whom she attributes to becoming her most poignant teacher. Beth explained how Pathfinders became a vehicle for this person to do some deep heart-opening work, acknowledging that "we didn't cure her cancer, but healed her heart." As Beth held this client's hand as she died, the client promised that she would continue to bug Beth "from the other side." Beth has felt her presence ever since and to this day, her spirit continues to guide Beth and her work with Pathfinders.

—Robyn Hubbard, Pathfinders Grief Counselor and Program Coordinator

COUNSELOR SPOTLIGHT: GETTING TO KNOW COUNSELOR AND SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAM DIRECTOR, LAURA IRMEN

What is your counseling background?

I began my journey by attaining my Master of Arts in Marriage and Family Therapy at the University of San Diego. I did my internship at Rady Children's Hospital and shortly thereafter secured a position in their school-based therapy program. I was placed at an urban school in San Diego where I provided individual and family therapy services. I learned so much during my time there and it stirred my passion for helping to support the mental health of children and adolescents in the schools. I quickly became a believer in the power of the therapeutic relationship as well as the strength of the human spirit. I was amazed at the growth and resiliency of these clients as they took risks to discover their strengths, open their hearts, and heal the parts that no longer served them. My journey led me to get my license in school counseling where I spent eight years working in elementary, middle, and high school settings. While I have a special place in my heart for child and adolescent work, I truly enjoy working with adults in my private practice as well.



How did you come to learn about Pathfinders?

I had been providing counseling services to schools in the Roaring Fork Valley, and one of my teammates in this endeavor was Missy Seigle, a Pathfinders counselor. It was through Missy that I learned about Pathfinders and I was incredibly grateful when she introduced me to Allison Daily.

How do you currently collaborate with Pathfinders and aid in furthering the Pathfinders' mission?

Upon meeting Allison, it became clear that my professional experience would be an excellent fit for Pathfinders and this led to my work supporting and coordinating our Pathfinders school-based program. In addition to working with children through this program, I see adult Pathfinders clients privately and I love my role as a clinical supervisor to one of our amazing Pathfinders counselors!

What would you say are your specialties and your primary methodologies when working with Pathfinders clients?

My area of expertise is working with clients experiencing trauma, anxiety, depression, grief and loss, and chronic illness. My approach is collaborative in nature. I believe in the power of being present for clients who are grieving a loss and providing them with the tools to process these strong emotions at their own pace. Everyone's journey in grief is so unique. I truly enjoy establishing rapport with clients and helping them to recognize their inner strengths. In my sessions, I utilize somatic and mindfulness approaches as well as internal family systems. I recently had the incredible opportunity to partner with Sheri Gaynor to provide equine therapy in a grief group. This had long been a dream of mine and I was so deeply grateful to witness how healing this powerful approach can be.

How has working with Pathfinders enabled you to grow as a therapist and what do you appreciate most about working with Pathfinders?

Working for Pathfinders has been one of my greatest honors. It is an extraordinary team of professionals and volunteers. The underlying feeling is that we are all dedicated to supporting our community in grief and loss. The special thing about our team is that we all look out for one another. Our Executive Director, Allison Daily, is behind this collaboration and support, setting the tone for all our incredible work. We are so blessed to have such a passionate and thoughtful leader. This sets the tone for all of the work we do to support Pathfinders' mission. I truly feel taken care of and I know Pathfinders has my best interest in mind as we work to support others. I appreciate all of the various supports Pathfinders has to offer, such as the Grief and Honor rafting trips, the Angel volunteers, and the generous donors that enable us to do this important work.

PATHFINDERS SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAM UPDATE

The Pathfinders school-based program began the school year with an active start, providing individual counseling to 32 students and faculty, facilitating six group counseling sessions, and offering a wide range of post-crisis, school-wide grief support from Aspen to Parachute. Our program accommodates a vast array of grief and loss scenarios including death, divorce, illness, immigration, and parent separation/incarceration. Pathfinders' counselors have been engaged in outreach to various schools throughout the valley to provide more information on our expanding program. We were fortunate to start the school year with an incredible training by one of our own, Amanda Petersen, on her important work with Focused Kids. We are grateful for the heartfelt feedback we continue to receive from school counselors and administrators throughout the valley, highlighting the remarkable services that our organization and our amazing counselors provide:

"Pathfinders, led by Allison Daily and her team of talented individuals, contributes time and energy to address mental health issues for students and staff. While we turn to Allison and her team in times of crisis, Pathfinders also helps teachers to stay grounded and healthy- whether they present a workshop, a quick lesson on coping strategies, or even offering to meet with staff 1:1 for mental health support. Pathfinders is always looking for ways to engage students and staff to foster balance and well-being. This organization is a gift to all of us; whether people are navigating a tragic loss, making sense of a terminal diagnosis, or just needing mental health support, Pathfinders truly makes a difference in the lives of everyone they touch. I do not have adequate words to express my gratitude for all that Pathfinders does for the Aspen High School community, not to mention the entire valley community."—Sarah Strassburger, Aspen High School Principal

"Jennifer has been a great help to our students working through grief and trauma. The kids feel valued and heard. She has been a resource for me too, in helping me find positive coping strategies to teach my students."—Amy Chabin, Cactus Valley Elementary School Counselor

"Pathfinders rises to the challenge of every complex and fraught situation in our community, and they—and Allison Daily, their director and figurehead—seem to have the superpower of ubiquity, managing to be everywhere and to be present for everyone in need, at exactly the right time and in the right way. Each of the last two years in the Aspen schools has begun with the tragic death of a student. Without the counseling and ongoing grief and loss support of Pathfinders, and the bright light of comfort that Allison and the Pathfinders' team offer to us all in our hardest hours, our community would be a much sadder place in which to live."—Katherine Sand, Aspen Family Connections

As our School-Based Program continues to grow and expand, we look forward to our continued support and commitment to all of our valley schools this year.

—Laura Irmen, Pathfinders Counselor and School-Based Program Coordinator

A NEW ERA OF COLLABORATION

In June, Pathfinders officially partnered with the Callaway Young Cancer Center at Valley View Hospital to provide a distinctive counseling opportunity. The collaboration enables Pathfinders to provide counseling two days per week for cancer patients, their families, and for cancer center staff when needed. This service provides support for coping with the challenges of living with a cancer diagnosis; talking through uncertainties about treatment options; identifying hope and the potential for growth through the cancer journey; facing the realities of transitioning to hospice when treatment is no longer available; and companioning end of life sentiments and concerns. As the lead counselor on this project, I have the opportunity to sit with patients while they are receiving their chemotherapy infusions or meet with patients and/or family members individually. I also now facilitate the cancer support group that has been a staple at the Cancer Center for many years. The group is comprised of a mix of people living with all stages of cancer diagnosis and treatment as well as many who are in remission. Those who participate carry a deep appreciation for the camaraderie, support, connection, and care that is shared amongst each other. In the time I have spent at the Callaway Young Cancer Center, I have enjoyed collaborating with the amazing group of oncologists, nurses, social workers, volunteers, and integrative therapy practitioners and it has been an honor to work with the many patients, caregivers, and families. It is such a special place. I feel blessed to have the opportunity to fill a much-needed support role and bring our exceptional Pathfinders offerings into the mix.

—Robyn Hubbard, Pathfinders Grief Counselor and Program Coordinator

LIVING WITH LONG COVID, AN EXTRAORDINARY PATH FORWARD

"Healing doesn't mean the damage never existed. It means the damage no longer controls your life."

—Akshay, Dubey

The past two years have been an evolving journey of uncertainty, grief, confusion, love, support, and eventually acceptance. We have all been fighting our own battles throughout the pandemic. I never imagined my health and ability to live life to the fullest would be taken away in an instant. In March 2020, I contracted Covid-19 which led to a post-viral illness called Post-Acute Sequelae SARS-Cov-2 infection (PASC) more commonly known as "long covid."

In the early months, when little was known about the condition, I attempted to soldier on. This led to months of suffering and confusion as to why my body was failing me. Walking even a half mile would result in flu-like symptoms, often lasting up to a week. Many of those afflicted suffer from debilitating fatigue and neurological issues such as brain fog and severe daily headaches. Along with so many others, I developed a heart condition called Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS), a form of Dysautonomia, which is essentially a dysfunction of the autonomic nervous system. I spent the first several months navigating the early stages of grief. I would rotate through shock, denial, anger, and depression as my life as I knew it began to disappear. Exercising was always my release from stress and both skiing and hiking fed my soul! My heart sank knowing I could no longer do these activities that made me feel so alive.

After a year of seeing countless doctors and trying many natural remedies, I wondered if I would ever get better. Why were there so few answers? Will this be my life now? It was all very disheartening. At first, I continued to try and push my limits, until it dawned on me that my efforts were making things worse. My inability to engage in physical and often mental exertion made me feel like I had lost a piece of myself. There were days in the first year when I couldn't bear to hold this truth in my mind. I felt very stuck.

What I eventually came to understand over the past two years, was that even in the hardest of times there are moments of relief and often joy. Pain and joy truly can and do coexist. I learned how to look inside and utilize tools like energy healing, yoga nidra, and being still in nature. I focused on what I could control each day, paced myself, and tried my best to capture and appreciate the small moments I still had in my life that made my heart sing. I connected to a group of long covid warriors in a national support forum started by a yoga teacher in New York City. Being able to connect with others that were experiencing the same confusing symptoms and emotions as I was, helped to unlock some of the pain. In this process, I met an incredible woman in Boston who had to quit her pediatric nurse position due to her debilitating condition. She asked me to be her "recovery buddy." Little did I know, our friendship and support would carry me through some of the darkest times on this journey. There is so much power in the gift of another human truly being present and witnessing your grief; not trying to fix it, but walking alongside you.



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I am also deeply grateful for all of the people in my life that stood by me and witnessed my pain while providing support. My husband, sweet dog, family, close friends, and Pathfinders colleagues were truly amazing! Some of my most meaningful relationships deepened as a result. Invisible illness is incredibly difficult to navigate and loved ones often feel very helpless. I am very lucky to have their continued support. There came a point on my journey when I began to recognize, on a deeper level, that I had the desire to help support others dealing with this mystery illness. When I finally landed in a place of acceptance, I was able to move toward this goal step by step. Eventually, the light began to shine a bit more and I felt gratitude for just being alive, promising myself that I would give back when I was able and provide a sense of hope to others. I am blessed to say that with a lot of patience, support from others, and hard work, my most debilitating symptoms began to lessen.

As I entered the recovery phase, I connected with several long covid clients through Pathfinders and was able to help them navigate their grief journeys. Recently, one of these clients shared with me how much my support has meant to her:

***My family and I have experienced long haul Covid for over two years. Working with Laura to find support- individually and as a caregiver- has been a huge bright spot for me. Each time we meet, our conversations are grounded in her gentle balance of supporting my circumstances, as well as developing strategies together for supporting my family. Laura is informed, genuine, and very relatable. I have felt heard and seen during our times together. Her experience as a long-hauler has put her in a unique place of absolute empathy and understanding toward people experiencing this confusing and often misunderstood condition. I am grateful for the sessions I've had through Pathfinders; they've been affordable, easy to schedule, and of great benefit."** —Angela, Pathfinders Long Covid Client*

Angela's words were incredibly meaningful to me and I would love to continue to offer support to anyone struggling and feeling as lost as I did. I want people to know that they are not alone; it takes courage to grieve and honor the pain that we carry. My heart still aches at times, but it is also fuller than it ever has been. I recently had the chance to float the Henry's Fork River in Idaho with two of my best girlfriends. I dreamed of doing these things for a long time and I experienced a profound level of peace and joy. I was alive and free again while at the same time learning to listen to my body as it has so much wisdom to share. Healing is not a linear process, but I try to honor the message that my body is telling me now. Healing became more about understanding myself than fixing something.

—Laura Irmen, Pathfinders Counselor and School-Based Program Coordinator

The following are a few of the resources that Laura found extremely beneficial and would recommend for those suffering from long covid: **Body Politic:** www.wearebodypolitic.com and **Dysautonomia International:** www.dysautonomiainternational.org



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