SPRING 2022

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PATHFINDERS
CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

On August 3, 2021, mental illness took an irreversible turn on my family. Tigey, the father of my 3 young girls and my partner of nearly 20 years, took his own life.



Immediately following his death, I desperately needed life to come to a standstill while I navigated the next steps, but unfortunately, that wasn't an option. The world kept turning and my kids needed me more than ever as we lived this horrific experience together. I wasn't sure how I was going to be there for them emotionally while I also took care of myself. I was now the sole parent with all the responsibility and I had no idea what the next steps were. Their mental well-being was a top priority, but the financial aspect weighed heavily on my mind. One minute it was life as normal and the next thing I knew, I was buying clothes for my children to wear to their father's funeral, planning the service, writing an obituary, and paying funeral expenses. Things were happening so quickly and not only was I unprepared, I had no idea what to do. I was hanging on by a thread. Honestly, life was a blur during that time.

I did not have the wherewithal to navigate the next steps and before I knew it, I was talking to Pathfinders counselor, Amanda Peterson, about scheduling an appointment for my daughter. Amanda let me know that Pathfinders would be able to assist me financially as I expressed worry over being able to pay for the therapy the four of us desperately needed. Initially, my 8-year-old daughter and I went to see "Ms. Amanda." In the first session, Lyla wouldn't let me leave her side but after just a couple of weeks I was dropping her off, and Ms. Amanda quickly became the highlight of her week. My middle daughter, Emme, who is 12, had six months of trauma therapy and then decided that she too wanted to meet with Amanda and they continue to do so weekly. Amanda has worked magic with both of them. They have opened up so much and our best times are reminiscing about their dad and all the stories we have of our time together. We are able to talk about how things make us feel and share both the good and the bad, the happy and the sad. Amanda checks in with me regularly as well and she continues to be instrumental in our healing journey.

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FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Pathfinders Supporters,

It is so nice to see the signs of spring around our valley! It always feels like new life to me, a sign of hope as the dark cold of winter lifts and we begin to enjoy our mountains in a different way. This year, more than ever, I am ready for a change in season.

At Pathfinders, no matter the time of year, we offer support for children and adults from Aspen to Parachute almost every single day of the week. There is a lot of pain amidst the beauty of where we live. This past year was incredibly intense. While many of the losses were local, some occurred in other areas of the country deeply affecting loved ones who live here. No matter the location or the scenario, the Pathfinders motto is always at the forefront and we do our best to ensure our community that, "You Never Have to Walk Alone."

Recently I began driving to Parachute to support middle and high school students directly affected by the tragic loss of their peers and/or family members. With little to no access to grief counseling in that part of the valley, we knew our services were needed. In just one session, these brave girls and boys cracked their hearts wide open for me and let the tears and fears flow. We talk about the unfairness of it all and how hard it has been to process death at such a young age. For these kids to know that I will be there with them each week has meant the world to them. Just like me, all of our counselors engage in this hard work every day and without question, they always show up, making a significant difference in the lives of many.



When you make a gift to Pathfinders it directly supports our ever-growing counseling programs, many of which you will read about in this newsletter. I am so proud to be a part of this incredible Pathfinders team, working with our 14 counselors to ensure support for those who need it most by showing up and doing the hard work. As we continue to offer a wide range of services to our community, please consider helping us make a difference by supporting our efforts.

With deep thanks for your care and time in reading this,

Allison Daily

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

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As for me, I have been working with Pathfinders counselor, Robyn Hubbard. We continue to meet weekly to talk about my fears, grief, and everything in between. Robyn listens intently as most weeks I simply fall apart. She talks to me about ways to work through the pain and sorrow as I navigate this new life. Sometimes it means moving my body when it seems too heavy to bear, other times it is writing down my feelings or messages to others that I need to get out. Robyn has taught me how to talk with my daughters about grief, suicide, and mental illness and not to be reluctant to share our experiences. While our lives will never be the same, our story hasn't ended. The hole in our hearts will always be there and these amazing professionals continue to guide us in living a happy and joyful life despite the pain. My girls and I talk about our feelings and figure out ways to express these difficult emotions, and we talk about what happened and how we will move forward together as a family. Despite all the challenges that have come with losing Tigey, I am now closer to my daughters than I could have ever imagined. We are forever grateful to Amanda, Robyn, and Pathfinders for all they have done and continue to do for us.

—Claire Eads, Pathfinders Client

PATHFINDERS BOARD MEMBER: **DAVID MORAY**

For David Moray, it was the loss of his 22-year-old son, Ben, that drew him to Pathfinders. When Ben passed away in his sleep in January of 2016, David was living in Los Angeles. He originally reached out to a grief organization in LA, but they were unable to give him the immediate support he needed. With a second home in Aspen, he had noticed an ad in the paper, prompting him to reach out to the Aspen Chapel which ultimately connected him to Pathfinders.



Ben & David Moray

When David flew to Aspen, we had our first session together and it was at this meeting that David finally felt his grieving and healing process had begun. David and I connected immediately and it meant so much to me to be able to support him on his grief journey. Soon after we met, David went to the University of Michigan to pack up Ben's belongings. When he arrived in Ann Arbor, I texted to check in on him. David said it touched him so much to feel supported by someone he had known for such a short time. In addition to our counseling sessions, I was also able to connect David with my late husband, Art. The two of them would walk and talk, sharing the pain and process of losing a son. As David navigated his deep pain, realizing he had people to share his loss with him made all the difference. He knew that when he came to a more grounded place within himself, he wanted to find a way to give back to Pathfinders. David has not only provided financial assistance, but he has also offered peer support to other men coping with grief. David's strong desire to be involved with Pathfinders made him a natural fit for our board and he has proudly served as a vital board member since 2020.

Grief is a never-ending process, filled with twists and turns, ups and downs. David received thoughtful care in his own process and now wants to support others in theirs. David has done just that by not only providing financial assistance but also by offering peer support to other men coping with grief. David has been someone who has blessed my life, and Pathfinders as an organization, beyond words. He is the person I can call at any time and he will show up, generously giving his heart, soul, and resources. David cares immensely and his desire to be involved not only comes from the fact that he is a good man, but even more importantly it is a way for him to honor his son. His love for Ben drives him and although there are still many broken pieces within him, giving back enables him to mend a little bit at a time.

All of us at Pathfinders are deeply grateful for David's service to our organization as both a board member and dedicated volunteer.

—Allison Daily, Executive Director

ONE TEEN'S GRIEF JOURNEY IN THE NAME OF ADVOCACY

In 2017, while still in high school, my sister, Emily, began her addiction recovery journey by enrolling in a residential treatment center. She committed to a new chapter of life in which she intended to bring hope to others struggling with substance use disorder. Emily has always been a shining light in the lives of individuals she touched, especially in my life.

On April 28, 2020, my 16th birthday, my sister passed away at the mere age of 21. Having been sober for over a year, she was given a "fake" pill laced with fentanyl, ending her life within minutes. When we received the call that she had passed, I didn't know how I was ever going to recover and I fell to my knees experiencing the most excruciating feeling I have ever felt. Yet, it was also at that moment that I sensed a presence calling me to continue her legacy by honoring one of her core life values, appreciating others without judgment.

Since losing Emily I have continued to embrace resiliency and have chosen to honor the energy surrounding my grief by helping others in their struggles. Soon after our loss, my family was determined to spread awareness within our community by purchasing and displaying purple flags, locally representing the loved ones we have lost to overdose. Placing 52 flags in 2020, we then saw the overdose count in our area increase by 30 percent in 2021, and that year we displayed 72 flags, spreading awareness and saving lives by encouraging people to ask questions and become involved in this cause.

In August 2021, alongside my mom and Pathfinders grief counselor, Laura Irmen, I coordinated the first-ever Overdose Awareness Day Event in our valley. With more than 200 people in attendance, the event featured speakers sharing their personal stories about substance use disorder; prevention information; Layperson Naloxone (NARCAN) training; live music; and a sunset honor walk. The showing of support in our small valley was incredible and the event offered a profound understanding of this disease and where help can be found. My sister continues to inspire me daily encouraging me to share the most important message of all, people are more than their substance use disorder and it is not shameful to get help. She has motivated me to be a stronger and more helpful person. Throughout this journey, I pray for God's guidance giving me the strength to continue her legacy by providing hope and forgiveness even on the most challenging of days.

As I navigate my grief journey, Laura has shown me great compassion and boosted my confidence, offering support that is free of judgment and providing me with new tools and resources that I can utilize in coping with my grief as well as in everyday life. My family also had the opportunity to participate in the Pathfinders Grief and Honor Raft Trip, which was not only peaceful and fun but was a powerful experience in which we gained tremendous insight into coping with our own grief. I have also found that by sharing her story and the knowledge I have gained with other students at local schools has helped me cope with my own emotions as well. I never know what each day holds, but spreading awareness puts me in a place of peace. I know Emily is watching over me and supports my grief by giving me the strength and guidance to continue every day by sharing the hardest thing I have ever been through.

This coming fall I will be attending Hope College to pursue a degree in nursing. Although Emily won't be here to share the joy of this big milestone with me, I have no doubt that she will be proud of me. While in college, I plan to pursue my advocacy work as there is such importance in teaching others about the dangers of fentanyl and no other family should have to experience the kind of heartbreak that mine has. As I journey into this new phase of life, I am excited about what lies ahead. I look to a rewarding future that allows me to pursue my passion of connecting with others free of judgment and getting to know people for who they are.

—Ashley Adams, Pathfinders Client

THE GROWTH AND VITALITY OF THE PATHFINDERS SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAM

The Pathfinders school-based program continues to grow at unprecedented rates, becoming a prominent and actively utilized program throughout the school year from Aspen to Parachute. Pathfinders counselors have supported both students and faculty through numerous valley-wide tragedies, along with generalized grief and loss. These counselors also provide the necessary support to navigate the continued stress and uncertainty created by the challenges of the pandemic. When the school year began this past fall, the Pathfinders school-based program had 27 new referrals and the program will close out the academic year with approximately 120 referrals.

Program director, Laura Irmen, has received wonderful feedback and meaningful testimonials about the impact our Pathfinders school-based program and counselors are having on our schools:

"The Pathfinders program has been very beneficial for our students who are grieving. The students enjoy being able to talk to someone who has expertise in grief. I have seen firsthand how Allison works with a student I meet with regularly. The student was nervous at first but has experienced a lot of loss and trauma in her life so naturally, she would be hesitant. Allison was great and built rapport with this student right away and the student was excited to continue meeting with Allison."

—School Counselor, Grand Valley Middle School in Parachute

"Our experience with Pathfinders far exceeded our expectations. Robyn's care, compassion, and expertise in the area of grief all contributed to healing and hope for our students. Pathfinders provides a much-needed service to our community that will have lasting impacts on mental health and well-being."

—Amy Spradlin, Two Rivers Community School in Glenwood Springs

"This year has been an especially hard year for Aspen Middle School with an 8th-grade death early in the school year. Allison Daily and Missy Seigle of Pathfinders helped in the face of crisis and stayed to follow through with their care in an inconceivably hard time for our students, families, and staff. Allison and Missy continue to be here for our students, facilitating grief groups on a weekly basis. Allison has been a wonderful support for me specifically during this year, I am not sure I would have been able to get through this year without the support of Allison and the Pathfinders team. Thank you, with all of my heart, thank you."

—Nick Stertz, Aspen Middle School Counselor

"The support we receive from Pathfinders is crucial to carrying out our mental health support to our students. Every time we have a need, Pathfinders is very willing to help and provide the necessary support. After a huge tragedy in our Glenwood community, the team at Pathfinders helped us tremendously by setting up grief groups for the students. These groups have allowed our teens to learn positive coping skills and they have been more stable in how they manage their grief. Pathfinders counselor, Jennifer Glynn, leads these groups and her communicative and flexible style has enabled our students to get emotional support without missing a lot of their educational time. Partnering with Pathfinders allows us to reach more students in need of mental health support."

—Marlon Funez, Glenwood Springs Middle School Counselor

"The staff at the Grand Valley Middle School & Family Resource Center are thankful as well as very very grateful to all the counselors from Pathfinders that help support our students and staff that are affected by grief and sadness. We thank them for their resilience during this time, it is very much appreciated!"

— Claudia Flores Cruz, School-Based Family Resource Coordinator, Grand Valley MS

COUNSELOR SPOTLIGHT:
THE ROAD FROM TEACHER TO GRIEF COUNSELOR



Amanda Petersen is one of our beloved Pathfinders counselors. Following the completion of her graduate program in Clinical Mental Health, Amanda arranged to do her internship with Pathfinders counselor, Laura Irmen. As soon as she started working with Pathfinders, Amanda knew she wanted to do it for a long time, as she loved the energy and feel of the organization.

Prior to becoming a counselor, Amanda spent 15 years as an elementary school teacher. Before ending her teaching career in 2017, she began to notice a shift in the classroom where students' behavior seemed to be more dysregulated and levels of stress were increasing. Through her involvement with the school-based mindfulness program, Mind Up, teaching students about the brain and self-regulation, she became passionate about supporting the social-emotional well-being of kids. She continues this important classroom work and parent coaching in her role as Program Director of FocusedKids. Additionally, through continuing education, she became a Certified Child and Adolescent Grief Counseling Specialist, which has provided her with developmentally appropriate language and tools to support kids through grief and loss.

Since joining Pathfinders, Amanda's area of focus has been our School-Based Program. For Amanda, working with kids comes very naturally to her. She is passionate about counseling and invested in specializing in grief work with both kids and adolescents. She shares that what is most important to her is creating a safe place for her clients to share openly and building a relationship of trust. She utilizes motivational interviewing and mindfulness practices, among other tools, to support her clients and she says that no matter what modality she is using, "it is the relationship that holds the most power." She likes to support kids experiencing anxiety, in expressing feelings and emotions and teaching them about emotional regulation.

Amanda feels so grateful that she gets to work as a Pathfinders counselor and be a stable, kind, and secure person for kids and their families when going through difficult times. She has continually expressed that "it feels like such an honor to work with this organization" and as an organization, we are truly honored to have her as part of our team!

—Robyn Hubbard, Pathfinders Grief Counselor

UPCOMING PATHFINDERS EVENTS

Grief Retreat: A Day of Nourishment and Renewal

Sunday, June 26
10:00 am-4:30 pm

Join us for a day-long retreat at a beautiful riverside ranch. The day includes time in nature, guided meditation, journaling, group sharing, and mini healing sessions for restoration and renewal.

For more information or to sign up, contact Robyn Hubbard at 970.319.6854.



"Not only was the Pathfinders grief and loss raft trip peaceful and fun, but it was such a powerful experience as we got to know everyone and their story and gained helpful insight on new tools and resources that could help us with our own grief. Throughout the whole trip, I felt no judgment in expressing myself and my feelings." —Ashley Adams, Pathfinders Client

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