

## Camp New Dawn Continues to Grow Into 2017

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Camp New Dawn Buddy, Morgan Meekins (left), helped camper Ava Knotts (right) express her feelings of grief during a support group.

What began as a weekend retreat for children 22 years ago, has grown into a grief retreat that encompasses five different programs—for children, teens, young children, adults and families. This annual program of Compass Regional Hospice’s Hope and Healing Center, is a three-day, two-night retreat for grieving children, teens and families held each summer at Camp Pecometh in Centreville, serving children

between the ages of four and 17 and their families.

In 2016, 101 campers, seven families, and 134 volunteers had fun, built friendships and were taught healthy ways to express their grief. “This was the largest group in Camp New Dawn’s 22-year history, which reflects the significant need for grief support in our community,” says Rhonda Knotts, Camp New Dawn Director. “Camp New Dawn provides individuals a place to normalize their feelings and meet others facing similar circumstances.”

At the start of the program, children and teen campers move through therapeutic workshops that are designed to give campers options that meet their interests and skills through music, art, and physical activities. “All of the workshops offer a lesson that the campers can take away from the experience,” says Knotts.

In between supervised activities such as swimming, fishing, arts and crafts, campers also attend age-specific support groups facilitated by adult group leaders who are trained to help express grief in a safe and natural environment. The support groups are designed to help campers process grief in healthy ways and to honor their loved one while building a toolbox of coping skills.

Camp New Dawn has grown into a grief program that meets the needs of all ages and stages of grief. Apart from the children and teen retreat on Monday the youngest of the campers, ages four to six, attend mini-camp. “Young children don’t necessarily have the tools to translate what they’re feeling and thinking into language, so the mini-camp provides these children with the opportunity to put words to their feelings while getting to know other children who are on a similar journey,” says Knotts.

Camp New Dawn also includes an adult and family retreat. Parents of campers arrive for an overnight session with other adults before they are joined by their children. While our campers are busy learning how to cope with their grief, the adult retreat helps restore participants to a place of wholeness as they learn to navigate their grief journey. At the end of the weekend the adults and children come together at family camp to learn skills that they can take home with them, which will help them rely on one another as they heal.

Without volunteers this grief retreat program would not be possible. The most visible volunteers are buddies, caring and compassionate adults who are paired up with campers to provide support. There are also support staff volunteers who tend to every detail of camp by helping plan, set up, and facilitate workshops and activities. Former campers, PALS and Campaters, can be found helping in an assortment of ways around camp and sharing their own personal experiences with campers.

“We look for people who have a variety of life experiences to volunteer for Camp New Dawn. The most important criteria is having a desire to help,” says Courtney Williams, Manager of Volunteer and Professional Services. “All volunteers are screened and trained to work within the mission of Camp New Dawn.”

The cost to operate Camp New Dawn far exceeds the registration fee charged for each camper and family. The cost to attend is \$30 per camper and \$75 per family. No one is ever turned away due to inability to pay. Compass Regional Hospice relies on community donations to cover camp expenses so that anyone who needs to attend camp may participate.

In 2016 Camp New Dawn was supported by several community fundraisers, donors, and grants. Many members of the community also donated materials, art supplies, and snacks that were used throughout the weekend.

As a new year begins, Camp New Dawn organizers are already heavily involved in preparing for the upcoming camp. The planning and continual improvement that goes into Camp New Dawn ensures that

the weekend retreat continues to grow to meet the needs of people of all ages and stages of grief. Each year Camp New Dawn introduces new elements to enhance the experience.

This year's Camp New Dawn will be held at Camp Pecometh near the end of August. The retreat for children and teens ages seven through 17 will be held Saturday, August 19 through Monday, August 21. On Monday, August 21, children ages four through six are welcome to attend mini-camp. The adult retreat begins on Sunday, August 20 for the adults and continues through Tuesday, August 22 for family camp.

For more information about Camp New Dawn or becoming a volunteer, contact Rhonda Knotts, 443-262-4109, [rknotts@compassregionalhospice.org](mailto:rknotts@compassregionalhospice.org). To learn more about Camp New Dawn, visit [www.compassregionalhospice.org/campnewdawn](http://www.compassregionalhospice.org/campnewdawn).

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