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For immediate release

New space will help more Calgarians cope with tragic loss

CALGARY – More Calgarians dealing with the death of a loved one will be able to get support with the opening of a new space for the Alberta Health Services (AHS) Grief Support Program, which was made possible through more than \$500,000 in donations to Calgary Health Trust.

The program, started by Reverend Bob Glasgow, has helped bereaved families in Calgary for more than two decades. However, it outgrew its current space capacity and a new space was needed to accommodate more clients.

“This new space will allow us to better coordinate grief support services throughout the Calgary Zone and provide a safe place for people to express and feel their emotions after a death of a loved one,” says Reverend Bob Glasgow, Coordinator, Grief Support Program. “It will allow AHS staff and volunteers to provide confidential counselling, group support and education to the community.”

When former clients Bob and Julie Hamilton and Michael and Linda Shaw heard about the need for funding for the new space, they didn’t hesitate to help out.

Bob and Julie Hamilton lost their son, Tim, in a workplace accident when he was 19 years-old. The loss was unbearable, but Julie heard about the Grief Support Program and contacted Bob Glasgow a few weeks after the accident to seek help. The couple had one-on-one sessions with Bob and also attended group counselling sessions with other parents who had recently lost a child. The group met formally for six weeks and after that, they got together once a month at each other’s homes for two years.

“Death, like birth, isn’t fully understood until you experience it. No one can prepare you for it, but the Grief Support Program taught us skills to cope with this very difficult time in our life,” says Julie. “I grieve and ache for Tim every day, but the program gave me tools I could use to grieve and still be able to love my daughter, my husband and get out the front door each day. Losing someone you love is something you never get over, and all Calgarians go through this at some point. The Grief Support Program helps people get back to a functioning life.”

Michael and Linda Shaw were a strong support system for the Hamilton’s. The families had been good friends for many years, and the Shaw’s helped Bob and Julie cope with their loss. But three years later, the unimaginable happened—Michael and Linda Shaw learned that their 15-year-old son, Michael (“Mikey”), had been killed during an avalanche on a school ski trip. Michael and Linda utilized the Grief Support Program to help them cope with the loss.

“The Grief Support Program allowed us to face our grief and get our lives back together again. Bob saved our lives and helped us stay together,” says Michael Shaw. “Most people don’t have experience with grief, nor do they know how to handle it. This program helps families cope as they struggle to manage grief, keep their homes together and rebuild their lives after a loss.”

When the Shaw's and the Hamilton's heard about the need for new space for the program, the couples didn't hesitate to help give back to the program and joined the Grief Support Fundraising Committee. Both Bob and Michael quickly picked up the phone and started calling friends and contacts, as well as issuing letters asking people for donations for the new program space.

"This is an incredible example where families who were positively impacted by an exceptional program have chosen to give back to help others," says Sally Flintoft, CEO, Calgary Health Trust. "We're very grateful to everyone who donated to this project. We're also very appreciative to the Grief Support Fundraising Committee for their dedication to raising funds because of their personal ties to the program."

The new space, located in the Richmond Road Diagnostic Treatment Centre, holds more offices for grief counsellors, additional meeting rooms and a library. This expansion will help reduce wait times for individual counselling sessions and will help accommodate more group sessions.

Media are invited to tour the facility today from 11 a.m. – 12 p.m. and will have an opportunity to interview Julie Hamilton, Michael Shaw and Reverend Bob Glasgow. Please meet in the main entrance at 11 a.m., where a representative will escort you to the event location.

In 2010-11, the Grief Support Program helped 1,111 clients. Individual counselling is presently offered to clients through a multi-disciplinary team of professional counsellors. In addition, Grief Support Program groups are offered each year to more than 450 participants. Group counselling is offered to individuals who have suffered the loss of a spouse, child, sibling, parent or loss through homicide.

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Calgary Health Trust connects donor passions with health care needs. Together we are touching lives in our community every day by raising funds for enhanced technology, programs and services at the Foothills Medical Centre, Peter Lougheed Centre, Rockyview General Hospital, Women's Health, Carewest continuing care centres and other community health programs and facilities. For information on Calgary Health Trust, visit www.calgaryhealthtrust.ca.

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Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than 3.7 million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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