

Healing Hearts



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In This Issue

- Matthew's Garden Rededication
- Bo's Place Representation at the National Alliance for Children's Grief Symposium
- Summertime Support Activities
- Volunteer Spotlight: Alex Parris
- Bo's Place Embarking on a Collaborative Learning Journey – the Childhood Bereavement Changemaker Initiative
- Run with Team Bo's Place in 2023
- Thank you to H-E-B Tournament of Champions Charitable Trust



Matthew's Garden Rededication





On a beautiful morning in May, the Bo's Place community came together for the rededication of Matthew's Garden, which is a cherished space of joy, connection to nature, and peace on our campus. Designed as a sensory garden for our youngest support group participants, Matthew's Garden is named in memory of Matthew Bishop Gray, the baby son of Lauren and Rob Gray who died suddenly at the age of 13 months. The reason for the rededication was the installation of a custom gate designed by Cory Wagner and his team at Dump Truck Designs. "Matthew's love of music, books, his blue car, our cat Zoe – Cory's gate captures all of it," shared Lauren. "Matthew was a special baby – content, affectionate, easygoing, adventurous—and like our other children, he made our lives a lot of fun...We want him to be remembered with joy, which is what he brought us every day. The gate, like Matthew's Garden, helps us share our precious son with all the families who come to Bo's Place to heal."

And so, this special day to honor Matthew Gray was planned with intentionality as a family celebration with activities that Matthew would have loved – songs, drums, and dance with his friends from Prelude Music, giant bubble stations from Texas Bubblers, a Kona shaved ice truck, Chick-fil-A, Michael's Cookie Jar cookies, arts and crafts, along with Curly and Daisy and their team staffing the face painting and balloon animal stations. It was a day of remembrance and a day of fun for all.

Lauren shared that Matthew's death created a gaping void for her family, a void that will never completely close, "but now when Rob and I come through this gate to visit Matthew's Garden with our kids, we know that Matthew is still a treasured part of our family. We can't touch him, but we can feel him." And it is the hope of all of us at Bo's Place that when you visit Matthew's Garden, or some other space that is special to you, that you feel the connection to your loved who may no longer be with you physically, but who lives on in your hearts and memories. We all felt the connection to Matthew that beautiful morning in May. He lives on in our hearts and memories whenever we walk through the gates of Matthew's Garden.



Bo's Place Representation at the National Alliance for Children's Grief Symposium

Greetings from Orlando! Members of our team were excited to represent Bo's Place at the 25th Annual National Symposium on Children's Grief. Taking place at the end of June in Orlando, Florida, there were 450 attendees present and over 50 grief-based workshops offered. What a wonderful opportunity to learn and network with fellow grief workers!

Staff attended a variety of workshops, including those with a focus on school-based groups, volunteer retention, online programs, activity planning, working with diverse populations, as well as self-care and resilience, among other topics. Takeaways from each session will inform our current programming and serve as motivation to add new components for future planning.



Symposium participants also had the privilege of visiting New Hope for Kids in central Florida, serving children and families suffering from grief, loss, or life-threatening illnesses. A big thank you to the National Alliance for Children's Grief for bringing us together for a wonderful symposium, and to New York Life Foundation for sponsoring the event. Together, we work towards a shared goal of ensuring that no child grieves alone.



Summertime Support Activities

It is summertime! Children are out of school; families have different schedules and activities and people often travel and try new things. Here are some ideas for ways to focus on your grief journey and the wide range of emotions and reactions it brings up this summer.



- **Cool-down kit:** Grief brings upon a whirlwind of feelings, and with changes in routine and structure, emotions can get heated in the summer! A cool-down kit can be a great way to set up strategies for calming down and relaxing when faced with big emotions. A cool-down kit consists of various comfort items to help manage stress and anxiety and helps promote self-regulation. When difficult feelings arise, family members can use the cool-down kit to take a break, engage with the items inside, and bring their emotional state to one of calmness. Examples of what could be included in a cool-down kit include bubbles, a notepad or journal, stuffed animal, playdoh, a favorite book, fidgets, a photo book of special pictures, a small puzzle, crayons and coloring book, or a pinwheel to encourage deep breathing. Items can be kept in a shoe box, tote bag, laundry basket, or any other household container and placed in an area where it can be easily accessed when you need to cool off.
- **Intentional Summer Travels:** It can be difficult to travel while grieving. Creating new memories without your person can bring up a lot of emotions. With some planning you can find ways to include the person you are grieving while traveling. As a family, consider what places your loved one enjoyed visiting, what cities/countries/theme parks were on their travel list, what activities they loved to engage in while traveling, and more. Then think of way you can honor your person during your trip. For example, you could visit a city they loved, eat their favorite food while there, and share your favorite memories of your person during this meal. Another example, a family shared with us is that their person that died loved the beach, so when they had a summer vacation on the beach, they had a ceremony where they shared memories and then each family member dropped a flower in the sea to be taken out by the waves in memory of their person. Allow yourselves to intentionally and mindfully participate in experiences that honor your person and allow you to connect them during your travels.
- **Summer Grief Playlist:** Create a playlist of meaningful songs you can have on when you are traveling or just need a musical escape. What songs do you find comforting to sing or listen to? What songs remind you of your person who died? What was their favorite song? What songs do you listen to when you are sad? What songs give you energy when you need a boost? What songs help you "chill out" and calm down after a busy or stressful day? Sometimes just having a few "go to" songs readily available can be helpful on your grief journey. All emotions are okay, and songs that are happy, sad, fun, or silly can be part of your Grief Playlist for the summer.
- **Bring Bo's Place with you:** If you would like to explore your grief with your family this summer, go online to [Bo's Place @home](#) to find resources and activities in English and Spanish.



Volunteer Spotlight: Alex Parris

Alex Parris was taking a class on death companioning during the summer of 2020 when she realized how impactful it can be to have community support while grieving the loss of a loved one. She began doing some research on grief support options in the Houston area and came across Bo's Place. Alex attended Volunteer Facilitator Training in February 2022 and quickly became an Online Adult Group facilitator. She just finished her first 9-week group and she said she can already feel the Bo's Place magic! While Alex was completing her observations, she had the opportunity to observe a teen group in-person. Her own personal grief experiences happened just before her teen years, so she shared that it was a very moving experience. "Being a teenager is already difficult enough without the loss of a parent, and their vulnerability surprised me," Alex said.

Alex enjoys being of service to her community and hearing the stories that every individual has to share. That is why she is starting her Master of Social Work program at the University of Houston full-time in August—congratulations, Alex! She hopes to work in hospice care or in bereavement services, so she is a



wonderful addition to Bo's Place. When she isn't working at her family's IT company or going to school, Alex enjoys reading and watching documentaries about various topics, using her creative side to do photography and collage, and spending time with her wife, two cats, and other family and friends.

Thank you, Alex, for your dedication to Bo's Place!



Bo's Place Embarking on a Collaborative Learning Journey - the Childhood Bereavement Changemaker Initiative



Bo's Place is one of 30 bereavement centers across the country to participate in the Childhood Bereavement Changemaker Initiative designed to empower bereavement partners to use data to inform decision making and enhance impact. Bo's Place will be focusing on data and evaluation needs for our expanding School Grief Support Program.

Executive Director Mary Beth Staine, Program Director Marian Mankin, LCSW-S, and School Program Manager Lori Bokone, M.Ed., LCP gathered with representatives from other Changemaker organizations at the National Alliance for Children's Grief Symposium in Orlando, Florida to get to know each other as we embark on this learning journey together. The Changemaker initiative is one of many initiatives in which the childhood bereavement field is working together to ensure that no child grieves alone. It was conceived by Judi's House/JAG Institute in Denver, Colorado with philanthropic support from New York Life Foundation and in collaboration with the National Alliance for Children's Grief.



Run with Team Bo's Place in 2023

Although temperatures are on the rise, we are dreaming about running in cooler weather with Team Bo's Place in January! Charity registrations are open for the 5K, half marathon and marathon and we would love to have you join us as we run for a reason. There are a few different ways to participate with us:

Fundraise for Registration: Sign up for a race and commit to donate or fundraise a minimum to secure your spot (\$650 for marathon and half marathon, \$250 for 5K).

HERO Registration: Sign up for a race and pay the registration fee + make a \$350 tax deductible donation to Bo's Place to secure your spot.



Every member of the team will receive a Team Bo's Place tech shirt to wear on race day, an invitation to a pancake breakfast at Bo's Place after the 5K, and monthly newsletters with training and fundraising tips. Additionally, the top overall fundraiser will receive an overnight hotel stay downtown the night before the half marathon or marathon to ensure that you're close to the starting line on race day! Register below or email marathon@bosplace.org with any questions.

Register Now



Thank you to H-E-B Tournament of Champions Charitable Trust!

In June, Bo's Place received a \$10,000 contribution for general operating funds from the H-E-B Tournament of Champions Charitable Trust. The H-E-B Tournament of Champions is an annual golf tournament sponsored by H-E-B that takes place in San Antonio, Texas. Proceeds from the tournament are donated to organizations providing vital services to children and families throughout the State of Texas. Bo's Place has been a beneficiary of the tournament since 2018. H-E-B also provided floral centerpieces at our 2022 Hearts of Hope Luncheon and has supported Bo's Place with both in-kind and monetary donations since 2009. Thank you HEB for your generous support of Bo's Place and our community.



Happenings

Rina Ocampo, Marathon Coordinator and Team Bo's Place captain, and Debbie Leder, Bo's Place board member, attended the Run for a Reason summer kick off to celebrate **Global Running Day** and welcome in the 2023 marathon season. Attendees went for a group run and had the opportunity to visit with various charities to learn more about the **Run for a Reason** program and its benefits. Team Bo's Place was excited to kick off the season and share more about the mission of Bo's Place!



Kristen and Travis Cowan presented Bo's Place with a generous donation from proceeds of their raffle at the Smilin' Rylen Fun Run. The **Smilin' Rylen Foundation** was created by Kristen and Travis as an organization whose purpose is to bring awareness to organ donation and help families in crisis after the death of their son, Rylen. Bo's Place is honored to be a part of Rylen's legacy through this special event and we are so proud to partner with this wonderful organization.



It's the end of June and the end of our fiscal year. As is our tradition at Bo's Place, we took a day to pause for reflection upon the successes and bright spots over the past year and enjoyed a **End-of-Fiscal-Year Celebratory Lunch!** All enjoyed barbecue and ice cream sundaes, followed by games. This is a much appreciated year end event full of fun and fellowship!



Bo's Place board member, Rick Smith, and School Programs Manager Lori Bokone, M.Ed., LPC, shared information about our grief support services at the **Memorial Hermann ER Navigation Health Fair** in June. The health fair celebrated Community Health Workers and featured twenty organizations that

provide notable services in the greater Houston area.



On June 28, the Bo's Place Board of Directors recognized fellow board member, Paul Vincent, for 9 years of service and welcomed him to his new role on the Advisory Board. The board also installed David Pluchinsky as the next President of the Board of Directors.



Bo's Place Grief Support Services

At Bo's Place, we believe that grieving families heal when they share their experiences with each other. We offer free Grief Support Groups in English and Spanish to families and individuals.

If you or someone you know would like information about Bo's Place Grief Support Groups for children, families, and adults, click [here](#) or call 713.942.8339.

Bo's Place exists to enhance the lives of those who have experienced the death of a loved one.

