

NARRATIVE

1. ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Judi’s House/JAG Institute is the only organization in Metro Denver devoted solely to supporting grieving children and their families with research-based care. Since its founding in 2002, Judi’s House has grown its capacity to provide grief- and trauma-informed care to more than 1,000 bereaved children and caregivers each year—at no cost to families. JAG Institute, also named in memory of Judith Ann Griesse, is a center of learning focused on extending the reach of our grief care model through research and education initiatives.

Judi’s House was founded with the mission to help children and families grieving a death find connection and healing. Our vision is that that no child should be alone in grief. Brian Griesse, former quarterback for the Denver Broncos, lost his mother Judi when he was 12 years old. He and his wife, Brook Griesse, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist specializing in childhood grief and trauma, created a safe space for grieving youth ages 3-25 and their families to receive compassionate and effective support.

Research demonstrates that the death of a parent, sibling, or other significant attachment figure is one of the most destabilizing experiences a child can endure. Despite evidence that childhood bereavement is a prevalent and critical public health issue that can have a profound impact on future wellbeing, resources for effective services are scarce. Judi’s House/JAG Institute is helping to prevent complications of unaddressed grief and trauma through our three core strategic initiatives—Direct Service, Training and Education, and Evaluation and Research. As we continue to support our local community, we are expanding our capacity to address the issue of childhood bereavement and meet the complex needs of grieving families anywhere through research and education. We strive to increase public awareness, educate professionals who work with youth, and create a network of grief- and trauma-informed mental health providers throughout Metro Denver and beyond. With this approach, we can support the whole child, family, and community in managing the immediate and long-term emotional and behavioral difficulties that can accompany childhood bereavement.

2. GOALS

A primary goal of Judi’s House/JAG Institute is to build a “proof of concept” in Metro Denver that meets the current need in our community—a best practices model that can be shared and replicated in other communities around the country. The Comprehensive Grief Care® (CGC) Model developed and evaluated at Judi’s House is an effective, trauma- and grief-informed approach to care that integrates knowledge drawn from a collaboration of community, practice, and research partners. JAG Institute’s Training and Education Initiative cultivates community capacity through the development of the CGC Network, which includes professionals, caregivers, and communities trained and educated in using the CGC approach to support grieving youth and families. Findings from the Evaluation and Research Initiative, also based at JAG Institute, advance the field of childhood bereavement by developing tools for professionals in the field and informing research-based best practices and standards of care.

3. CURRENT PROGRAMS

Direct Services: Providing the Comprehensive Grief Care® Model

By assessing each child’s unique bereavement response, we can recommend services and programs to meet their specific needs. Our core program, *Pathfinders*, follows a research-based curriculum developed and continuously evaluated at Judi’s House/JAG Institute. Parallel groups for children and their caregivers allow for individually tailored and developmentally appropriate services. Our interventions target social and emotional skills, such as communication, problem solving, and self-regulation, that will serve our youth through their grief journey and other life challenges. *Pathfinders* groups also allow participants opportunities for memorializing, connecting with understanding peers, and integrating a coherent narrative of the loss into their lives. Each year we provide group or individual grief counseling services to more than 500 children and 300 caregivers across Denver and its surrounding counties.

Families who seek services at Judi’s House represent diverse backgrounds, family constellations, and grief experiences. Our services are provided at no cost to our clients at our physical location and in schools and community organizations throughout Metro Denver. Although we serve many newly bereaved families in our community, barriers such as distance, child care, and other life stressors prevent some from coming to our center. Our Community-Based Care Team provides *Pathfinders* grief counseling groups to approximately 20 Metro area schools and community organizations each year to reach youth who might not otherwise be able to attend at the Judi’s House location.

In 2017, our **Direct Service** goals are to:

1. Conduct comprehensive assessments of grief- and trauma-related needs for more than 600 children and caregivers to recommend and inform appropriate care.
2. Provide 170 grief counseling groups at Judi’s House and in schools and community settings.
3. Increase the number of new schools served by 50%.

Training and Education: Increasing Access and Cultivating Community Capacity

Judi’s House is proud to be an approved internship and practicum site for many clinical training programs with local universities. Our clinical staff provides over 1,400 hours of in-depth training to 15 graduate and post graduate trainees annually. In addition, we provide educational and professional development workshops to schools, universities, service agencies, and professional audiences at conferences and symposia, primarily in Colorado. Our longer-term plan includes developing multi-level training modules to increase workforce capacity in grief- and trauma-informed care. This will allow us to meet the unique needs of diverse communities, including rural areas with limited access to effective grief support programs, by training the professionals and clinicians already located in those areas.

Our **Training and Education** goals for 2017 include:

1. Provide intensive training to 15 graduate level and postgraduate professionals.
2. Distribute CGC tools for professionals working with grieving children and families.
3. Conduct trainings, workshops, and educational sessions to grow a grief- and trauma-informed network of care in our community.

Evaluation and Research: Informing Programs and Advancing the Field

For over a decade, assessment processes have been in place at Judi’s House that meet our immediate clinical needs and allow for academic-level evaluation and research data to emerge. The diversity within our population offers a very important advantage in gathering population level data that characterizes the needs of bereaved youth and families. Our dataset allows us to evaluate the effectiveness of our services, refine our programs, and provide practical guidance to the field. For example, the Adjustment to Trauma, Loss, and Adversity Scale (ATLAS) was developed at Judi’s House to assess and track children’s adjustment before and after a death. It examines the impact of bereavement and the effect of grief interventions on emotional, cognitive, behavioral, physical, academic, and social adjustment.

In 2017, our **Evaluation and Research** goals include:

1. Refine the Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model (CBEM) tool to establish more accurate prevalence regionally and nationwide.
2. Complete data collection from a minimum of 1,200 non-bereaved individuals (stratified by age and gender) in order to empirically validate the Adjustment to Trauma, Loss, and Adversity Scale.
3. Strengthen our knowledge by continuing to grow our data warehouse and explore data from over 2,000 families comprised of over 7,000 unique individuals.

4. PROGRAM OR PROJECT REQUESTS ONLY

N/A

5. EVALUATION

Since our inception, Judi’s House has valued learning from the families we serve to inform continual improvement. Through these efforts, we track the number of children and caregivers served each year, along with economic and social factors, to ensure we are reaching those most in need. We administer standardized and grief-specific measures at the client’s initial assessment and at the completion of our *Pathfinders* program, post-intervention. Assessment includes both adult and child self-reports about experiences, symptoms, psychosocial adjustment, and benefits they are receiving from the grief support services. Approximately half to two-thirds of youth and their caregivers arriving at Judi’s House are identified as high risk on at least one standardized measure of adjustment. We evaluate our impact by analyzing outcomes for both children and caregivers upon completion of our programs. Evaluation findings indicate that families’ grief-related difficulties improve markedly after attending just ten weeks of *Pathfinders*.

6. COLLABORATION

Throughout our history, we have worked with with more than 76 schools in Denver, Adams, Arapahoe, and Jefferson County public school districts, where we have provided on-site grief counseling programs for children and adolescents. A longstanding research collaboration with the University of Colorado helped us establish our Evaluation and Research Initiative and has informed our programs and the childhood bereavement field. Additionally, we partner with several Colorado universities to offer internships and provide clinical training to graduate and postgraduate professionals each year in order to strengthen the mental health workforce and expand the network of grief care providers. We also foster cross-referral partnerships with area

hospitals, clinics, social service agencies, and hospices in our collaborative approach to supporting grieving children and families.

7. INCLUSIVENESS

Judi’s House actively seeks to break down barriers to care, ensuring that anyone in need of support is able to participate in its programs. This is accomplished by: recruiting a diverse team including bilingual and bicultural staff, trainees, and volunteers; actively reaching out to the Spanish-speaking community; offering counseling groups in schools and other community settings; and developing culturally competent curricula.

In 2016, approximately 35% of families seeking services at Judi’s House identified as minorities. Judi’s House also serves families from a wide range of socioeconomic statuses, including many who are below poverty level. By providing all services free of charge and not requiring insurance or a clinical diagnosis, Judi’s House facilitates easier access to care.

8. BOARD/GOVERNANCE

Our board of directors meets quarterly to provide governance, strategic planning, and fundraising assistance to the Chief Executive Officer and the organization’s leadership team. In 2016, we expanded our board of community and business leaders from 9 to 12, and we continue to focus on improving board diversity. All board members contribute financially and commit to three-year terms, as stipulated by the organization’s bylaws and policies.

9. VOLUNTEERS

As a complement to the care provided by our professional grief counselors and trainees, grieving children are supported during group sessions by volunteer companions. These volunteers attend a two-day training and commit to a year-long schedule in which they attend a *Pathfinders* group once a week during each of our four, ten-week sessions. Nourishment provider volunteers also purchase and prepare meals for families before every night of our *Pathfinders* and *Connections* groups, and additional volunteers support our administrative and facility needs. In 2016, 411 volunteers provided 9,890 hours of service.

10. PLANNING

We have developed a multi-year approach to implementing our Comprehensive Grief Care efforts, with our most recent three-year Strategic Plan (2016-18) focused on extending the reach of our three core strategic initiatives. Expanded capacity at this level has demanded rigorous, ongoing planning, as well as the development of a robust fundraising approach in which we are successfully leveraging a broadened income base. As we continue to grow our capacity to meet an increased demand for our services throughout Colorado, we are also implementing improved technology solutions. We are designing and developing online, self-directed, interactive, and individualized grief support tools and resources that will ultimately support grieving families who would not otherwise have access to services.