



# Donor Family Services Winter 2025 Newsletter

Dear Donor Families,

As we step into 2025, I want to take a moment to reflect on the meaningful work we accomplished together in 2024 through Donor Family Services. Here are some highlights:

- 1,653 new donor families joined our bereavement support program.
- 652 letters were sent to on request to donor families, sharing the impact of your loved one's donation on others.
- 422 letters from tissue recipients were received through our Thanks2You program.
- 25,651 touchpoints—including contacts, phone calls, and other support—were made with donor families.
- 16 Donor Family events were held in Florida, the Northwest region, and Virginia, with over 625 attendees.

Our Donor Family Services Team is a group of dedicated and compassionate individuals whose top priority is supporting you. The team includes:

- Northwest Region: Andrew Kruse & Michelle Low, Donor Family Advocates
- Florida: Sumi Kiran, Donor Family Advocate
- Virginia: Amanda Atkinson & Kris Laraway, Administrative Assistants; Krystal Giordano, Mike Jones, & Paulette Cordes, Donor Family Advocates; Debbie Hutt, Director

It is an honor to hear your stories, learn about your loved ones, and connect with you at Donor Family events. We value your feedback and suggestions on how we can continue to support you and your family on your grief journey.

Please feel free to reach out to us at [DFS@lifenethealth.org](mailto:DFS@lifenethealth.org)—we look forward to hearing from you.

If you would like more information about any of our programs, contact us at 800-847-7831 or [DFS@lifenethealth.org](mailto:DFS@lifenethealth.org)

\*Please check our website – [healingthespirit.org](http://healingthespirit.org) and the Donor Family Facebook page for updates and additional event information.

## 2025 Donor Family Event Schedule\*

### In Celebration & Remembrance

#### Virginia

- March 23: Roanoke
- April 6: Richmond
- April 27: Norfolk/Va Beach

#### Pacific Northwest

- May 4: Edmonds, WA
- TBD: Eastern/Central, WA
- Oct 5: Billings, MT

#### Florida

- Sept 7: Jacksonville Beach
- Sept 28: Pensacola

### Donor Family Hike

June 28:  
Renton/Edmonds Area

### Donor Family Baseball Games

#### Virginia

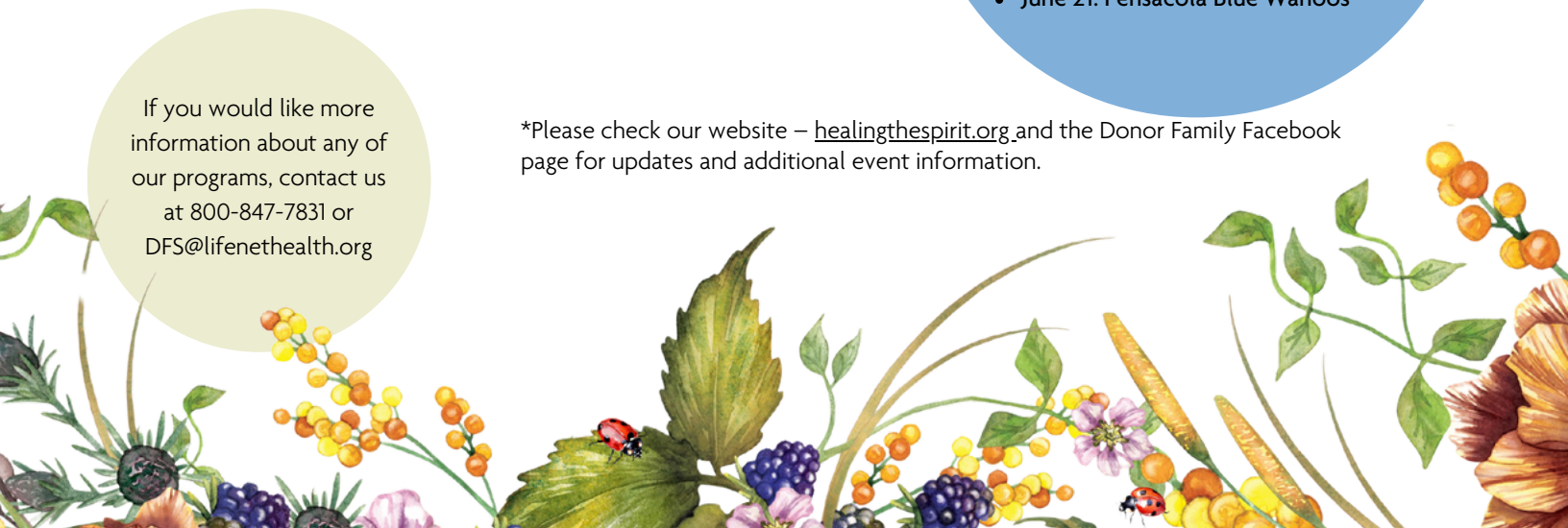
- July 20: Norfolk Tides
- TBD: Salem Red Sox
- TBD: Richmond Flying Squirrels

#### Pacific Northwest

- Aug 25: Mariners

#### Florida

- May 4: Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp
- June 21: Pensacola Blue Wahoos





## Healing Tears

Dear Dr. Leary:

*I am anxious about the upcoming one-year anniversary of my son's death, but I am overwhelmed with how the long, dark days of winter spiral me down into deeper grief. Any insights?*

*-Spiraling*

Dear Overwhelmed:

There is a normal anxious anticipation to the first anniversary after the death of a loved one. You have never been through this moment of grief of this loved one before and the fear of being swallowed up by this grief can stop us in our tracks. We feel alone; we feel unprepared; we feel rudderless. Can I cope with the upsurge of feelings? How will I handle my reactions and what will help get me through this? It might be helpful to separate the feelings of grief, depression, and the effects of seasonal affective disorder (SAD), often experienced in the winter. The emotions are closely connected but there are important differences that might provide hope and perspective.

Grief is a normal reaction to a significant loss. If you lost a loved one, it's expected for you to be stricken with grief for a long time—much longer than the two-week criterion for depression. You wrestle with a range of feelings and try to find meaning in what feels like a black hole. Grief may take a lifetime to soften.

Sadness can feel like depression, but the feelings come and go, and is interrupted with moments of happiness and activity. Sadness is part of depression but differs in intensity, duration, and negative behavioral changes.

Depression lasts longer than 2 weeks and is paired with a loss of energy, trouble concentrating or making decisions, difficulty sleeping, disruption in eating patterns, feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness or thoughts of self-harm.

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and grief reactions are similar in that they both can include changes in appetite, sleep disturbances, fatigue, sadness or depressed mood, anxiety or irritability, a sense of hopelessness, and increased thoughts of death or suicide is characterized by any combination of feelings of sadness or despair; lack of interest in activities; low energy; agitation; difficulty concentrating, increased thoughts of death or suicide.

SAD can threaten our equilibrium and can exacerbate grief; it may feel like we have taken a turn for the worse. There are steps you can take to ease the burden of grief during longer, darker days.

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Lani Leary, Ph.D., specializes in work with chronically ill, dying and bereaved clients. Dr. Leary has worked for the past 35 years as a psychotherapist in private practice and in eight hospices across the country. Have a question for Dr. Leary? Contact us at [DFS@lifenethealth.org](mailto:DFS@lifenethealth.org).



*Healing Tears (cont.)*

- Build compassion for yourself. Be gentle with yourself. Do not compare your grief to others who are coping differently. There is no one right way to adjust to the loss of a loved one. How do you honor your loved one? Count your strengths and not your missteps.
- Ask for support from family, friends, clergy, a counselor, or a grief support group. The therapy of choice is companionship and listening. Who might sit with you in your grief and encourage you to face all your feelings?
- Expose yourself to sunlight as often as possible. Get outside as often as possible; open the curtains; check into light therapy using a SAD light box. A resource can be found at <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/seasonal-affective-disorder/in-depth/seasonal-affective-disorder-treatment/art-20048298>

- Lani

## Your Public Library: An Underused Resource for Learning About Grief

If you have ever gone to a bookstore and looked at the “grief” section, you know there are a plethora of books and it is almost impossible to know where to start. They range from self-help to descriptions of the grief process and personal stories of people who have walked through the dark valley of loss. Another thing you will notice is that it can be costly to acquire these resources. Buying a book (or three, as in my case) may not fit your already-tight budget.

Recently during one of our Donor Family Advocate Committee meetings I was asking our members what grief resources are available that do not get a lot of attention. One of our members was quick to respond: public libraries. A lot of those books that are \$15 to \$20 at your local bookstore can be found at your local library for free. Also, if you don't consider yourself a reader, most public libraries allow you to use your membership card to login online and get audiobooks without having to pay for a subscription through another provider.



So where should you start? Below I will provide some recommendations based on conversations, podcasts and articles about grief that I have recently learned from:

- It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand by Megan Devine\*
- Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief by David Kessler
- Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph. D
- A Sherpa Named Zoi: How to walk through Grief, And live with Intention by Eric Hodgdon

\*Join us for a virtual book discussion of this book in September 2025 (Date and Time TBD).



HEALING THE SPIRIT





## Creativity and Dealing with Loss

By Andrew Kruse, Donor Family Advocate

In 2023 I traveled to Japan and got to spend time learning about some of the food, culture and traditions that are treasured by the Japanese people. One thing I learned about Japanese pottery is that instead of rejoining ceramic pieces with a camouflaged adhesive, they have an art form called kintsugi, translated to “golden joinery.” This method “employs a special urushi lacquer, made from tree sap, dusted with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. Once completed, beautiful seams of gold glint in the conspicuous cracks of ceramic wares, giving a one-of-a-kind appearance to each “repaired” piece.” (1)



Photo: Stock Photos from Lia\_t/Shutterstock

In some ways when dealing with grief we would like to go back to looking and feeling “normal”, but over time the cracks and brokenness from our grief journey are filled in and over time give the glimmer of hope to others that they too can experience joy and a sense of purpose again. One way that has been helpful and brought hope, as I have spoken with many donor families, is to express oneself creatively. Perhaps that is through writing poetry or short stories, drawing, painting, graphic design, photography or song writing. Nowadays there are grief coloring books, websites that help you develop journaling skills, and art therapy groups. Creativity can help you express your emotions in a way that respect the fact that grief, like art, is a process and that rushing it can cause damage.

Megan Cooper, on the blog [Love To Know](#) (2), suggests 7 grief activities to help:

1. Try stream of consciousness poetry
2. Create a Grief Scrapbook
3. Make a Self-Portrait Series Documenting Your Healing
4. Custom Draw a Commemorative Tattoo
5. Make a Shadow Box with Mementoes
6. Craft a Quilt out of a Loved one’s clothes (Or inquire about the Donor Family Services Quilts of Love program)
7. Experiment with different mediums in an abstract piece

Your art piece does not have to be a masterpiece to display, but it is a part of your grief story and can be encouraging to others who are not as far along in their grief journey. Your art, much like your grief, is not flawed, it is a picture of where you have been and who you are becoming. Shine your glimmer of hope and remember the beauty of embracing grief and loss, like gold in the cracks of a broken piece of Japanese pottery adds value and honors the memory of its past.

(1) [mymodernmet.com/kintsugi-kintsukuroi/](https://mymodernmet.com/kintsugi-kintsukuroi/)

(2) [lovetoknow.com/life/grief-loss/grief-art-activities](https://lovetoknow.com/life/grief-loss/grief-art-activities)