

Camp Kerry Society

2019 Annual Report





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I first met Kerry in 2006. I was a Palliative Care Counsellor and Family Grief Program Coordinator at Lions Gate Hospital. Kerry was my client. For a year, I walked alongside Kerry, her husband Bob and their two young children as Kerry fought a valiant battle against colon cancer.

Kerry passed away that December. It was the end of her extraordinary life and the beginning of her beautiful legacy.

Bob asked that friends and family donate in Kerry's memory to the family bereavement support program I ran. Almost immediately, \$15,000 generously poured in from people around the world. With it, Bob and I decided to create a special retreat for young families grieving the death of a loved one.

Affectionately called Camp Kerry, Bob, myself and a small group of amazing volunteers welcomed our first eleven families to camp on Keats Island in September 2007.

Since then, Camp Kerry has served thousands of families like Kerry's in BC, Ontario and Atlantic Canada through family camps as well as year-round counselling, support groups, expressive arts therapy, community choirs and much more.

At the heart of everything we do is a deep sense of compassion and a belief in the healing power of community. Every year, our team connects with families as they navigate the most challenging experiences of their lives.

As you read this Annual Report, I hope you will smile and feel the life-changing impact of your participation and generosity. Thank you for your support and encouragement.

Heather

Dr. Heather Mohan
Executive Director, Camp Kerry Society

Loss + Isolation

“When you’re grieving, everyone tries to support you but they don’t know what to say. So I started telling everyone that I was okay and they believed me - but inside I was falling apart.” - Patrick

When Patrick lost his wife and baby daughter in a plane crash, he was left alone to raise his older daughter, Claire. Navigating the fog of his own grief while learning how to be a single parent and support Claire in her own pain was incredibly isolating.

Patrick’s reaction to keep his grief hidden away and try to move on quietly is not unusual. His friends and family cared deeply about him, but they didn’t know what to say or how to help. This is a common experience in Canada.

Western culture places great value on our ability to cope with emotions independently and not dwell on heart-wrenching experiences. We are conditioned to avoid talking about “unfixable” problems like death and dying with those around us. These topics are taboo. They are reserved for counsellors and therapists.

Whether this silence causes those who are grieving to withdraw and isolate themselves, or if it provokes anger, anxiety or depression, the impact of losing someone close is significant and long lasting. Grief is an under-recognized risk factor for a host of serious long-term mental and physical health impacts.

- 1 in 5 people will develop clinical depression within a year of a significant loss.
- Children and youth are significantly more vulnerable to poor mental health outcomes in the two years following a loss.
- 20% of teen suicide attempts are by a youth who has experienced a major loss.
- The probability of hospitalization for injury or mental illness triples in the three years following the loss of a child.

Traditional grief counselling often focuses on the experience of sadness, helplessness and pain. It can be limited to standard, office-based appointments and rarely takes creative, unique forms.

At Camp Kerry, we know that there is a better way.

We harness the love, compassion and creativity of an entire community to support and embrace those who are grieving.



Research shows a direct correlation between belonging to a strong, consistent, nurturing community and our ability to respond to traumatic events with creativity, courage and resilience.

Community affirms our capacity for relationships, healing and change.

Together, with the support of people like you, we create this community by bringing those who are grieving together at family retreats, in group therapy, in community choirs, online and through a well-established network of counsellors, art and music therapists and trained volunteers.

Camp Kerry's mission is to foster a "community of belonging" that provides grieving families with a memorable and positive experience of connection, healing and hope. **We have a vision of a world where nobody has to walk through grief alone.**

Family Retreats

"Going to Camp Kerry gave our family a chance to spend time together, grieve, celebrate our loved ones, and be surrounded by a community that absolutely loved and supported us." - Naadia

At Camp Kerry, we are best known for our annual family retreats. Hosted in BC, Ontario and Atlantic Canada in 2019, our three family retreats brought together upwards of 60 families for four-day weekends of adventure, fun, authenticity and compassionate connection.

Together with professional grief counsellors, as well as a diverse team of volunteers including hospice nurses, first responders, teachers, counsellors and camp alumni, the Camp Kerry team helps families connect with each other and with others who can understand and relate to their personal experience with loss.

Campers ranging from toddlers to grandparents experience adventure-based activities, art therapy, music therapy, group counselling, healing rituals of remembrance and much more.

The goal is to provide space for family members of all ages to strengthen bonds within their own family, connect with peers, create new positive memories and navigate their grief in a safe community that truly understands.

Over time, many families transition from being participants to volunteers and peer mentor families, using their hard-earned experience to reach out and help other moms, dads, grandparents and children at the beginning of their grief journey.



2019 PARTICIPANTS

Camp Kerry Atlantic: 51 Campers

Camp Kerry Ontario: 51 Campers

Camp Kerry BC: 112 Campers

Including over 130 children and teens



"My children were very opposed to one-on-one counselling. They did not feel comfortable there. This approach simply wasn't going to work for our family. I was scared. I worried how they would process their grief after the sudden loss of their dad. I knew it would impact their entire lives. I searched everywhere for other resources, but they just weren't there. Thankfully I found Camp Kerry and it was the best thing that could have happened to us. Both my children love going to Camp and have whole-heartedly participated in Circles of Strength Grief Groups throughout the year. They have found hope. And they have a healthy way to share, process and live with their loss."

- Andrea, Camp Kerry Atlantic Alumni



Rockridge Canyon in Princeton, BC.
Thanks to the generous partnership of
The Sovereign Order of Saint John,
Camp Kerry BC has been hosted here since 2018.

Grief is a Journey

"Kids and teenagers don't like sitting around and talking about their feelings—they don't articulate grief the same way as adults do. Outlets for creative expression are critical." - Pam

At Camp Kerry, we go beyond traditional counselling approaches to harness the love, compassion and creativity of an entire community to support and embrace those who are grieving.

Our holistic approach to bereavement care emphasizes healing both within and between families. We utilize art, music, outdoor activities, volunteerism, group therapy and individual therapy to help children, teens and adults learn to live life after loss.





In addition to our annual family retreats, Camp Kerry provided the following year-round support services in 2019:

Circles of Strength Bereavement Support Groups

116 people, including 49 children, participated in Circles of Strength in BC and New Brunswick. Hosted by experienced therapists with the help of trained volunteers, Circles of Strength groups provide regular opportunities for bereaved families and individuals to connect and share their experiences in a supportive peer group setting.

Synergy Community Choir

33 people participated in our Community Choirs in North Vancouver and New Westminster. Facilitated by a music therapist with the support of volunteers, the choir is a space for grieving youth and adults to come together weekly to connect with others living with loss, to express their feelings through music, and to learn positive ways of coping and self-care.

Grief Counselling Services

Camp Kerry's in-house grief counselling services provided 151 sessions, including expressive arts therapy, for children, youth, adults and families.

Grief + Loss Workshops

703 people attended our 25 Grief and Loss Workshops hosted in schools, colleges, hospitals and community centres. Camp Kerry's customized workshops equip participants to better support, encourage and create safe spaces and compassionate communities for those who are grieving.

The Power of Music

Meaghan Jackson has been a music therapist with Camp Kerry since the very beginning in 2007. She has attended family retreats, facilitated Circles of Strength Grief Groups and led music therapy workshops.

When my beloved, musical Grandfather was dying of a brain tumour in 2003, he couldn't speak. So I brought my discman to the hospice and we listened to music together, one last time. I felt his body relax when I pressed play on the Oscar Peterson CD. I held his hand and we listened together. That was the first time I really understood the deeply healing power of music. While grieving his loss, I wrote my first song.

After 13 years as a professional music therapist in palliative and bereavement care, I've experienced this power in many forms. Music gives people who are hurting the chance to feel and express their emotions when they don't yet have the words to share their pain.

I've seen how valuable this can be in connecting family members to one another.

In my role as a Music Therapist at Camp Kerry, I've seen music help children express an important memory or feeling about a parent or loved one they're missing. Sometimes they are feeling shy and don't want to speak up when we're just talking. But when the music moves them and they feel connected to others through song and songwriting, they find the courage to add their voice to the chorus.

These moments of communication within families and alongside other grieving children are an invaluable part of healing from loss. Camp Kerry has built a compassionate community dedicated to creating a space for moments like these. Through



"I find that choir is better than anything else I can do for my heart. We talk about feelings a lot. We talk about why we're singing - how we can better the journey through life with song. Every week I have the chance to reflect on how I can release and express what I'm holding inside - how I can sing and grow in resilience and strength."

- Victor, Community Choir Participant

music, art, support groups and outdoor adventure activities, families are given an incredible gift: the opportunity to rebuild relationships with each other and to rediscover themselves after a heart-breaking loss.

My grandfather taught me everything I know about music, family and connection. I am so grateful for this last gift he gave me: the loving, healing & connecting power of music therapy. It means the world to me that I get to share this with our Camp Kerry community.

Starting my Chapter Two

Jeanette is a Camp Kerry Alumni, donor and volunteer. She's active in the Camp Kerry Ontario community and graciously offered to share her personal story with you here.



My hands were shaking. I could feel my pulse vibrating in my ears. Dizzy and sweating, I held fast to the ropes and stole a glance 30 feet downward at the ground.

Emily, my 8-year-old daughter, was filming me with my phone, cheering me on like she always does, "C'mon Mom! You can do it!"

I steadied myself, took a deep breath and slowly stepped forward.

A few minutes later, two feet safely back on the ground, I gave Emily a big hug. I finally did it! I felt so confident, like I could do anything.

Completing the high ropes course at Camp Kerry had been on my bucket list for years. Emily - brave and resilient - had done it already. But it took me some time to gather the courage to conquer it.

Today, looking back, I am so proud of how far Emily and I have come.

Seven years ago, when Emily was just a toddler, I came home from work to find my

husband, the love of my life, unresponsive on the couch. I'm a paramedic, so I knew what to do. But it was too late to save him. James was pronounced dead at the hospital later that day - the result of an unexpected cardiac arrest.

Saying goodbye to James so suddenly was heartbreaking. We had just moved to a farm in Norwood, Ontario, a small rural community that gave James the chance to pursue his dream of owning a farm. He loved cruising around the yard on his ride-on mower, growing organic vegetables and caring for his many loving dogs.

In the weeks and months following James' death, I felt so alone. Emily and I were isolated geographically and emotionally. I was learning to navigate the sea of my own grief and I had no idea how to help a three-year old manage hers.

When the counsellor I was assigned through my employee assistance program told me he had no idea either, I was discouraged.

He referred us to a hospice in a neighbouring town where they did have a children's grief group, but Emily was too young to attend. So I was handed a Sesame Street DVD about losing a parent. We watched it together, and it helped. But that was it. I was on my own again.



A few months later, someone from the hospice called and offered to introduce me to a new community: Camp Kerry.

Camp Kerry wasn't just new to me, it was new to Ontario. 2014 was the first year for Camp Kerry Ontario, and Emily and I were invited to attend the inaugural four-day family retreat. I was so excited. I knew right away this was a chance for more support. But what I didn't know was how life-changing my experience with Camp Kerry would turn out to be.

I remember sitting in the counselling group that first year and hearing everyone else tell their stories. I cried, not just because I was sad, but because it was the first time I could tell my story to people who truly understood.

I talked with parents learning how to raise children on their own. I problem-solved with dads whose kids were also too young for grief groups. I chuckled with widows who understood why sometimes my tears turned to laughter.

There was a shared understanding at Camp Kerry that made me feel less alone.

For Emily, it's been so meaningful to connect with other kids who have experienced their own loss. I know at school she often feels that she's different than her classmates, but at Camp Kerry she doesn't have to feel that way. She's known and understood for who she is.

The understanding, friendship and community that I found at Camp Kerry became the pillar of my "Chapter Two" - that's what I call my life after James.

Every year I leave Camp Kerry feeling like I needed it. It propels me forward. It equips me as a parent and inspires me as a person to rebuild my life and find joy again.

Because of a work conflict, we weren't able to go to Camp Kerry this past year. Emily and I were both sad, but we decided to help pay for another family to go, and that made our sadness lighter.

When Emily is a bit older, we will volunteer together at Camp Kerry. We'll be there to help families navigate their own loss, and show them that it's possible to be happy and healthy again.

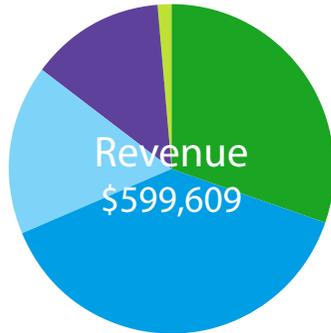
Camp Kerry changed our lives. It gave us permission to challenge each other to be brave and try new things - even 30 feet above the ground. I couldn't be prouder of who Emily is becoming and I am filled with so much hope for the future.

Thank you for giving us a solid foundation to start the second chapter of our lives.



Financial Report

Camp Kerry programs are made possible by generous individual, corporate, foundation and government supporters. Participants contribute to programs when they are able, but no one is ever turned away from a Camp Kerry program if they are unable to pay.



● Donations	\$183,069
● Fundraising Events	\$229,448
● Foundation Grants	\$99,272
● Government Grants	\$80,000
● Other Income	\$7,820



● Admin & Fundraising	\$116,878
● Program Investment	\$391,290

Excludes revenue and expenses for Kerry's Boutique. This is a brief summary of our financial statements from April 2018 - March 2019. A full version of Camp Kerry Society's financial statements are available upon request .



What You Can Do

Give

Generous donations from over 350 individuals, companies and foundations made Camp Kerry's programs possible last year. We are deeply grateful to everyone who reached out to care for others in this way.

Join our community of compassionate donors at CampKerrySociety.org.

Volunteer

Volunteerism is at the heart of Camp Kerry's approach to community building. Last year alone over 200 people gave their time and skills to serve others and cultivate a safe space for hurting families.

Learn about volunteer opportunities by reaching out to info@campkerry.org

Learn

Camp Kerry is a leader in the development of grief and loss education. Last year we humbly delivered 25 workshops in schools, offices, hospices, hospitals and community centres. We believe that changing the way our society responds to death and dying is an essential part of tackling important social issues like the mental health crisis, rising suicide rates and the opioid epidemic.

Participate in one of our 2020 workshops to increase your own understanding of the grief journey and how you can support yourself, your clients or your loved ones better.



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