Support Groups for Children and Adolescents Experiencing the Death of a Sibling: A Grant Proposal

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The purpose of this project was to write a grant to establish a series of support groups for children and adolescents experiencing grief after the death of a sibling. The goal of these groups will be to provide participants with activities and discussions to normalize the grieving process, inspire them to share their own experiences, and impart hope (Morgan & Roberts, 2010).

While enduring the death of a sibling, some children may not feel only sadness, but also feelings of being alone, angry, stressed, confused, and perhaps even neglected by their family members. These feelings typically lead to an overall negative effect on the child’s quality of life (Houtzager, Grootenhuis, Caron, & Last, 2003).

Researchers studying grieving children over time have found that those adolescents who did not receive meaningful support from their family and community felt a great sense of social disconnectedness and disappointment regarding those who surround them (McNess, 2007). On the other hand, those who did receive adequate support were able to maintain positive outlooks towards the future (McNess, 2007).
Social Work Relevance

- There have been many studies of a parent’s coping strategies after the loss of a child as well as a child’s grieving process after a parent dies. However, there is less information directed at the siblings of terminally ill children and therefore a lack of resources in the community for those in need.

- The importance of human relationships, a core value of social work (NASW, 1996), is also relevant to any group setting. When social workers attempt to gather similar people facing similar challenges, these people are able to form trusting relationships with others in a safe and confidential setting that promotes strength, hope, and overall well-being (NASW, 1996).
Cross-Cultural Relevance

- Understanding grief and bereavement across various cultures is essential as traditions and opinions around death vary greatly (Morgan & Roberts, 2010).
  - For example, some cultures believe that children are too young or vulnerable to attend funerals (Morgan & Roberts, 2010), while others would not even think about not bringing their children.
  - African Americans more often prefer traditional burial ceremonies, including several prayers and songs, and were less likely to have loved ones cremated (Glass & Samual, 2010).
  - People in Hispanic culture may use sarcasm as a way to cope with death through the use of nicknames, mockery, caricatures, and upbeat music (Diaz-Cabello, 2004).
- Social Workers should be educated about these differences and feel confident that the group will be a safe place for all to share without judgment or criticism.
Methods

• Target Population
  ○ Male and female children between the ages of 5 and 18 years.
  ○ The children will all have a sibling who has died due to a terminal illness, creating homogeneity and a sense of understanding between group members.
  ○ Due to a lack of support groups available in Orange County, California for children, the program will serve those in proximity to Newport Beach, California.

• Strategies Used to Find a Funding Source
  ○ Several grant databases were accessed through the Internet. One heavily examined was grants.gov; However it unfortunately did not reveal any funding sources for children or adolescent support groups.
  ○ Several sources were found through the Google search engine using key phrases such as “finding a grant,” “grief group,” support groups,” “grants for children’s groups,” and “bereavement groups.”
Methods

• Funding Source
  ○ The Foundation for Grieving Children was chosen because it’s grant recipients included similar agencies such as hospices, schools, and bereavement centers providing support groups and education to children and their families. It also had the greatest number of benefactors and was open to a wider range of funding.

• Sources Used for Needs Assessment
  ○ The U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. News and World Report, and peer reviewed journals.

• Projected Budget
  ○ The amount requested is $80,300, which includes personnel salaries and benefits, direct program expenses, and in-kind donations.
• Program Summary and Description
  ○ The proposal is for three support groups of 8 to 10 participants (ages 5-6, 7-12, and 13-18). These groups will be open and meet weekly for 90 minutes. Activities will validate and normalize the grieving process, facilitate the exploration of emotions, and promote social interaction.
  ○ To accomplish this, activities will depend on age-appropriateness and include ice-breakers, movies and books on grief, playtime, and homework.

• Population Served
  ○ Over 3 million people live in Orange County, California as of 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). In terms of ethnicity, 43.1% are Caucasian non-Hispanic, 34.1% Hispanic, 18.9% Asian, and 2% African American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The goal will be to serve approximately 24 to 30 participants between 5 and 18 years old.

• Sustainability
  ○ Throughout the year, the data from initial and final surveys of participants and parents will be analyzed and ultimately ensure the group is benefitting its members while documenting the success of the program for the funder.
Grant Proposal

- **Program Objectives**
  - All participants will discuss their current state of emotions at least once every two weeks.
  - All participants will be given handouts containing information about death and the grieving process.
  - At least 80% of the participants will discuss how they feel about the handouts in the following group meeting.
  - All participants will read a book or watch a movie related to grief during the group meeting.
  - At least 90% of participants will engage in deep breathing exercises at least once between group meetings.
  - All participants will report progress in various schools subjects as well as the workplace (if applicable) once a month.

- **Program Evaluation**
  - Paired t-tests will be used to compare pre-intervention and post-intervention scores of surveys given at intake and termination.
Lessons Learned/Implications for Social Work

- Lessons Learned
  - This grant writer learned that writing a grant is a lengthy process that includes extensive research to identify a problem and determine how additional resources would assist a particular population.
  - Overall, this grant writer found the process to be very educational and essential to her growth within the field of social work. Despite this benefit, there were also some challenging aspects. Perhaps the most challenging for the grant writer was the literature review and determining which articles provided the greatest evidence of the need for this program. Countless studies were analyzed for their relevance and several were found to be irrelevant due to their focus on adults, making it hard to develop a good literature review on bereaved youth.

- Implications for Social Work
  - Support groups for children suffering from the loss of a sibling have clear relevance to social work in that they deal with ensuring the well-being of participants during a difficult time. With the creation of this support group, it is hoped greater awareness will be generated regarding the need for more similar groups and resources for bereaved siblings.
  - Data collected through the pre- and post-tests may promote the need for further research based on one’s sense of emotional support related to his or her demographic information and/or his or her overall attendance.
References