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## New Center in Westfield Will Help Children and Parents Coping With Grief

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WESTFIELD, NJ—This April, [Imagine, A Center for Coping with Loss](#), will open in Westfield and begin serving families with children ages 3 through 18 who have had a parent or sibling die. Drawing on her own experiences, [Good Grief](#) Founder and former Executive Director Mary Robinson hopes to help some of the thousands of Union County kids who lost loved ones at this new center and, one day, other centers like it.

"My long-term goal is to see a center or similar program in every county," Robinson said. "Over 20,000 New Jersey children annually will lose a parent to death, so the need is enormous." That number does not include children who lose a sibling, whom the center will also serve.

Robinson comes to Imagine with an extensive background in nonprofit management, information technology and fundraising. But the reason she came to call herself an advocate for grieving children everywhere is personal more than professional.

"My dad died when I was 14. The impact of his loss on me, my brother and my family ... we had such a hard time after my father died," Robinson explained. "I lost years of my life to unresolved grief."

What she came to realize, she said, was that "a loss doesn't have to have a terrible impact on a child's life." Through support groups at Imagine, children will learn that they are not alone—that other families are going through similar experiences. They will have the opportunity to share their feelings in an emotionally safe environment, "using things like arts and crafts, music and drama—a whole range of healing modalities," she said.

For younger children, she said, play will be the most important therapy. "Their toys are their tools," she said. Children will also learn healthy ways to use the emotional energy they build up, such as hollering into a "scream box," punching a pillow or stomping on bubble wrap.

And while children get help in these ways, parents who are dealing with their own grief as well as their children's will have access to the support that they need. "It's like on an airplane, when they say, 'Put on your own mask first,'" said Robinson, explaining that a parent's emotional health has a great deal of impact on the child's.

It is no coincidence that this new center is being created in Westfield. "[Imagine in Westfield](#) was started thanks to the generosity and inspiration of Dr. Gerald Glasser, who is the catalyst for creating Imagine as a center for healing and hope that will serve families in the Westfield area," said Robinson.

"Dr. Glasser rallied many of the area's community leaders behind this important project, and has provided funding through the Thomas Glasser Foundation to support the center in its formative stage," explained Robinson. "The foundation is a philanthropic organization set up in memory of Dr. Glasser's son, Thomas Glasser, who was a victim of the 9/11 attack. Dr. Glasser, who was born and raised in Westfield and subsequently raised his own family here, wanted to ensure grief support services were available, accessible and local to Westfield families and the surrounding communities after Good Grief moved from Summit to Morristown."

In addition to startup funding, the Thomas Glasser Foundation has provided a challenge grant to Imagine—for every \$100 raised by Imagine from the community the foundation will add \$50.

Though she knows that the center will definitely be located somewhere in Westfield, Robinson is still in the processes of choosing a space. She hopes to announce an official address soon.

Meanwhile, volunteers are needed to facilitate future support groups. The next training session will take place during March 23 through March 26. The only requirements are that volunteers be "loving listeners" and at least 21 years old. "You don't have to come pre-trained. People come from all walks of life to do this," said Robinson.

Robinson has much planned for Imagine's future, including educational workshops in local school districts and in the community about grief and loss and how to support children and teens who are grieving. In 2013, the center will begin to serve families coping with terminal and chronic illnesses. This fall, she hopes to begin training teens as facilitators, as well.

Families coping with loss due to death may contact Imagine directly at 908-334-5723 or [info@imaginenj.org](mailto:info@imaginenj.org). To volunteer contact [volunteer@imaginenj.org](mailto:volunteer@imaginenj.org) or call 908-334-5723. For more information or to donate, visit [www.imaginenj.org](http://www.imaginenj.org) or contact [info@imaginenj.org](mailto:info@imaginenj.org) or 908-334-5723.

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