ADAPTING AND MOBILIZING DURING THE PANDEMIC: CAMP ERIN® BOSTON

The Parmenter Foundation was thrilled to fund Camp Erin Boston as the program astutely pivoted to an adapted camp model to maintain support for grieving children during the pandemic. On short notice, Camp Erin Boston converted from planning its traditional in-person, three-day bereavement camp to developing new virtual events, including Camp Erin Boston Project Reunion. This was a huge undertaking, but the Camp Erin team met the challenge head-on as they contacted more than 1,000 campers and volunteers from the past eight years to coordinate online camp reunions.

The reunions, held via Zoom, consisted of music, slide shows and videos from previous camps, and emotional reminiscing among campers, “Big Buddies,” and grief counselors. Campers also did “show and tells” to share objects or photos of their loved ones who had passed and took part in a modified version of their traditional “luminary ceremony,” during which they lit candles in memory of their deceased persons. This was a meaningful opportunity for the Camp Erin team to connect with numerous families from past camps and hear about their grief journeys and experiences during the pandemic. It was also a forum in which to provide psycho-education and support around grief and its manifestations over time, as well as emphasize the importance of virtual grief support services throughout this extraordinary crisis.

2020 GRACE JOHNSON VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION AWARD WINNER: GRACE CHEN

Apropos of the award’s namesake, this year, the Parmenter Board of Trustees bestowed the Grace Johnson Volunteer Appreciation Award to outstanding volunteer, Grace Chen, of Camp Casco. In 2015, Grace first volunteered as a camp counselor at Camp Casco, where she immediately brought limitless energy and enthusiasm to enriching the lives of children who were enduring or had battled cancer. She made an indelible impression that first summer and went on to play an integral role on the year-round Camp Casco team, writing grants and assisting the organization in any way possible.

Since then, Grace has volunteered at seven camp sessions and assumed a leadership position, planning and executing all camp activities, sitting on the Board, and helping to run all 2020 camps. When COVID-19 hit, Grace was instrumental in converting the camp to a virtual setting, safely supporting families who were simultaneously facing the struggles of the pandemic and cancer. Amazingly, Grace tackled all her responsibilities at Camp Casco while completing her Ph.D. in Biology at MIT and working as a research scientist at a pharmaceutical company.

Whether she’s dressed in a silly costume, belting out a camp song at the top of her lungs, or helping a child with a broken leg to wrap his cast for swimming, Grace ensures every camper feels at ease, cared for, and uplifted. She also encourages and motivates all her fellow volunteers with her limitless positivity, gracious praise and modeling of not only outstanding leadership qualities but also immeasurable compassion for children.

In 2005, Parmenter established the Grace Johnson Volunteer Appreciation Award in recognition of Wayland resident Grace Johnson for her hands-on work as a committed community volunteer and board member at numerous charitable organizations. Grace Chen is truly a worthy recipient of this honor.
The Parmenter Foundation has proudly granted more than $13,000 to Advocates for its collaboration with Jeff’s Place to establish a COVID-19 virtual grief support program. Framingham-based Advocates shapes creative solutions for community members who face developmental, mental health, or other life challenges. As the organization continued to provide behavioral health services during the pandemic, via virtual and outdoor sessions, its clinicians recognized that adults needed additional support specific to the mental health effects of this unprecedented crisis.

Many MetroWest residents have been experiencing increasing levels of loneliness, depression, and anxiety, as they are either fearful of or have already been touched by illness, financial difficulties, or other hardships. Some have lost friends or family members and have missed out on the typical rituals and ceremonies around grieving a death, due to recent restrictions.

With guidance and training from grief expert Jennifer Kaplan, founder and CEO of Jeff’s Place children’s bereavement support center in Framingham, Advocates will run new, specialized support groups to address these unique bereavement issues. The four 12-week sessions, scheduled to continue through next year, are specifically tailored for those who have experienced the loss of a loved one due to COVID-19 or during this pandemic. If you would like more information, please visit parmenterfoundation.org.

This year, Parmenter’s beautiful Lights of Remembrance service, held virtually, raised thousands of dollars to support hospice care in the MetroWest community. Patrons honored the memories of their loved ones by funding lights to illuminate the Dora Efthim Healing Garden in Wayland. This tranquil garden was a wonderful setting for the service and is a peaceful space to reflect on life, love and loss.

The Dora Efthim Healing Garden, adjacent to the Parlin Hospice Residence, was established in 2000 by longtime MetroWest residents Bill and Mavis Efthim to memorialize Bill’s inspirational older sister, Dora. Suffering from Lupus, Dora became bedridden at age 27, just as Bill left home to serve in the US Army during the Korean War. While Bill was away, their mother was Dora’s sole caretaker until Dora sadly succumbed to her illness the following year. Bill was compelled to honor his sister through a healing garden, serving the community and specifically families involved with hospice care, a service that would have been extremely beneficial to his own family during his sister’s end of life journey.

The garden was designed by Wayland resident Susan S. Foley and is modeled after a Native American medicine wheel, representing four character traits: wisdom, illumination, introspection, and innocence. The space also features paperbark maple trees whose peeling bark symbolizes loss and renewal and a granite “rain catcher” sculpture created by Morgan Faulds Pike. The Efthims have been committed to the garden since its inception, spending countless hours tending to it and ensuring it is lovingly maintained as a therapeutic respite for all its visitors.

Please give.

Donations may be made online at www.parmenterfoundation.org. Thank you for your continued support!

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