

# **How to Create an Effective Bereavement Volunteer Program**

**NCHPP Bereavement Professional Section Chat  
April 3, 2019**

# Purpose and Benefits of a Bereavement Volunteer Program

## **Purpose:**

- provide additional interdisciplinary means to support caregiver.

## **Benefits:**

- These vols play a significant role in brv services- particularly with survivors at low risk for complicated grief
- Rewarding volunteer work:
  - fulfills the hospice mission - care to families
  - volunteer feels engaged and highly valued

# Regulatory Issues

## **Federal Regulations:**

- Volunteer should:
  - Be oriented to the tasks they will be providing
  - Receive ongoing in-servicing on bereavement topics
  - Have a signed job description that lists bereavement activities
  - Receive a competency evaluation initially and ongoing
  - Receive supervision for bereavement care performed

# Recruiting Bereavement Volunteers

- Active/retired mental health professionals/clergy and interns are perfect!
- Recruit from:
  - *your active volunteer pool*
  - *a list of community professionals*
- Recruitment letter to survivors
- Press releases, ads, fliers that have a specific call
- Interns from social work/mental health departments
- Solicit paid staff to:
  - Recruit caregivers they feel are ready to volunteer
  - Bereavement Manager can recruit during grief presentations at faith institutions, hospitals, etc.

# 15 Month Recruitment Letter

Dear first name of CGV and family,

We at -----continue to think about you and realize that it has been a little over a year since your loss. It is our hope that you are adjusting to the changes in your life.

After a little time has passed, it is not uncommon for some family members and friends to ask how they can be of service to other hospice patients and their families. Many individuals who want to help have found that volunteering can be a rewarding and fulfilling part of their life.

We would like to extend an invitation for you to explore joining us as a volunteer. The volunteer is often one of the most valued members of the hospice team and is able to offer hospice families a variety of services including friendly visits or helpful breaks for caregivers.

The understanding and compassion from someone as yourself, who has experienced a similar loss, can often bring much comfort to other patients and their loved ones.



## HELP SOMEONE HEAL

*No One Should Grieve Alone*



Be a VITAS Bereavement Volunteer ...  
and be there when someone is grieving.

Bereavement Volunteers support the family following the death of a VITAS hospice patient. You may make phone calls, drop in for visits, help organize support groups and memorial services or send mailings.

Volunteers work with the VITAS hospice team, including the chaplain, social worker and bereavement manager. You learn the stages of grief, how to listen and how to understand different belief systems, different kinds of loss, complicated grief factors and your own reactions to loss.

Turn a few hours of free time into a life-altering experience—for you and for someone who needs you.

For more information on VITAS Volunteer opportunities contact:

S T A M P

# Talking Points to Recruit Bereavement Volunteers

- As a survivor, you can help those who are newly bereaved
- A rewarding way to “give back something that you have received”
- You are an integral member of the bereavement team
- You can learn important life lessons as you witness others going through a challenging life experience

# Advertising your Bereavement Volunteer Program Internally

- Highly trained and supervised, these volunteers greatly enhance the provision of bereavement care
- They assist bereavement staff with follow-up to low-risked bereaved, allowing staff to focus on higher risk
- They assist the bereavement team with clerical tasks



# Screening and Interviewing Potential Bereavement Volunteers

## **In screening potential volunteer we look for:**

- Education
- Health/hospice work experience
- Other work experience with mourners
- Personal experience of loss

# Screening and Interviewing Potential Bereavement Volunteers

- Has the volunteer grieved own losses and is able to discuss them?
- Can the volunteer articulate what helped/didn't help in his/her own grief experience?
- Can the volunteer be comfortable in listening to a range of emotions?
- Can the volunteer accept the “angry at God and everyone else stage” without judging or trying to “fix” it?

# Training Bereavement Volunteers

- Initial patient care volunteer orientation
- We require additional training that covers:
  - *Experiential exercises with discussion*
  - *Grief theories – what does grief look like?*
  - *Physical–emotional–cognitive– spiritual aspects of grief*
  - *Normal versus complicated grief reactions and the volunteer's role*
  - *Specific types of losses: spouse–parent–sibling–child*
  - *When and how to refer back to the bereavement team*

# Training Bereavement Volunteers

- *Active and reflective listening skills; barriers to communication*
- *“Do’s and Don’ts” of communicating with the bereaved*
- *Techniques used to assist the bereaved*
- *The use of bereavement support groups*
- *How to differentiate between depression and grief*
- *Suicide assessment techniques and the role of the volunteer*

# What Bereavement Volunteers Do

- Bereavement Telephone Assurance (TAP) support calls
- Bereavement visits- with low risk survivors
- Co-facilitate bereavement support groups
- Co-facilitate socialization groups
- Help create and participate in Memorial Services
- Provide support to a family experiencing anticipatory grief
- Make referrals to community bereavement resources

# What Bereavement Volunteers Do

- Assist with bereavement mailings
- Sew Bereavement Bears
- Calls to survivors to invite them to bereavement support events
- Transportation to bereavement support events

# Volunteer Manager Tasks

- The bereavement manager and volunteer manager work together in training and supervising bereavement volunteers.
- The **volunteer manager** is generally responsible for:
  - *recruiting the volunteer*
  - *providing the patient care volunteer orientation*
  - *completing the volunteer's personnel file*
  - *providing "other" volunteer training and support as needed*
  - *entering volunteer hours, etc.*

# Bereavement Manager Tasks

- *Providing bereavement volunteer training and in-services- becomes familiar with volunteer's strengths/ interests*
- *Assigning the volunteer to a team or individual caregiver*
- *Reviewing the care plan scope and frequency of volunteer's interventions*
- *Reviewing the volunteer's notes and their communication with team*
- *Providing consultation and clinical supervision to the volunteer regarding the case*



# Supervision of Bereavement Volunteers

- The bereavement manager, volunteer manager, team manager and bereavement staff can all have a role
- Supervision might consist of:
  - *Case consultation*
  - *Ongoing educational opportunities, supervision and support events*
  - *E-mail communication, newsletter correspondence, support letters and cards*
  - *Review of documentation and care planning*
  - *Supervision of phone calls and visits- especially initially*
  - *Co-facilitation of bereavement events with the volunteer.*

# Retention Activities for Bereavement Volunteers

- Quarterly in-service offerings, ongoing recognition events, phone calls, greeting cards
- Peer and manager-support opportunities
  - vital that volunteers have an opportunity to share experiences of working with bereaved
  - inform volunteers of community bereavement educational opportunities, helpful websites, library resources, etc.

# Evaluation of the Bereavement Volunteer Program

- Gather feedback from bereavement and management staff
- Send bereavement volunteers an evaluation of the bereavement volunteer program and satisfaction survey
- Solicit their opinions for improvements to the program
- Mail the caregivers a bereavement satisfaction survey. Include a question about the bereavement volunteer program.
  - *“Overall, how would you rate the bereavement volunteer services you received?”*
- Have the bereavement manager review whether bereavement volunteer interventions are effective.

# Questions?

- **Lead facilitator:** Robin Fiorelli, LCSW, NCHPP Bereavement Professional Section Steering Committee Member, Sr. Director of Bereavement and Volunteers, VITAS Innovative Hospice Care of San Diego, San Diego, CA with assistance from the Bereavement Professional Section Steering Committee Members and Section Leader.
- Joelle Osterhaus, MSW, LCSW, LICSW, ACHP-SW, NCHPP Bereavement Professional Section Steering Committee Member, Hospice & Home Based Palliative Care Psychosocial Services Supervisor, Kaiser Permanente Continuing Care, Portland, OR
- Melissa Lunardini, NCHPP Bereavement Professional Section Steering Committee Member, Children's Bereavement Manager, The Elizabeth Hospice, Escondido, CA
- Cindi Gray, MSW, LCSW, NCHPP Bereavement Professional Section Steering Committee Member, Director of Grief Support Programs, Hospice of Santa Cruz County, Scotts Valley, CA
- Diane Snyder Cowan, MA, MT-BC, CHPCA, NCHPP Bereavement Professional Section Leader, Director of Bereavement Center, Hospice of the Western Reserve, Inc in Cleveland, OH