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## Finding Hope In Grief

The Cove Center For Grieving Children Comes To Stonington

By Bree Shirvell | [Email the author](#) | March 3, 2011

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It's a place to remember those they've lost, a place to feel safe, and even a place to find joy.

For 16 years the Cove Center for Grieving Children has given children suffering from what may be one of the hardest things for a child to understand—the death of a significant person in their lives, a place to heal. And now, after struggling to find the resources to open a center in Stonington, southeastern Connecticut has its very own place for children and their families to come and grieve, heal and hope.

“It was breaking my heart that we had all these families in Stonington, but didn't have the funding,” Executive Director Mary Andersen said.

With the Stonington site, the Cove Center for Grieving Center now has five sites throughout Connecticut in addition to their coordinating office in Meridian. Andersen said before the center opens a new location, they want to make sure they have the need, community commitment, and financial support to stay in the area long-term.

“If we had the funding, we could easily open three more sites—there is such a need,” Andersen said.

In Stonington, the opening of the site is largely the result of one family's tragedy and their dedication to helping others the way the Cove Center helped them.

Darlene Stefanski lost her husband Jack several years ago, and a friend introduced her to the Cove Center. At the time, the closest location was in Guilford.

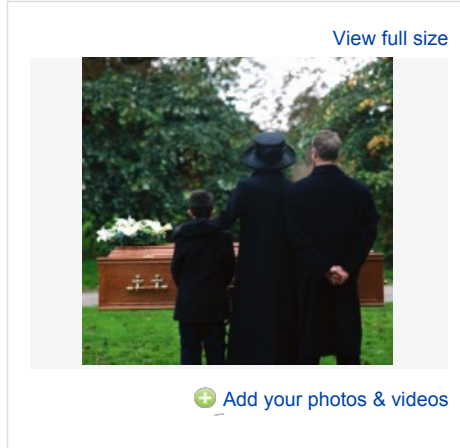
“For three years I drove 45 minutes each way,” Stefanski said.

Her son was 6-years-old at the time of Jack's death and her daughter was 19-months-old. In the meantime Stefanski said there continued to be considerable loss in the Mystic and Stonington communities and she joined a young widows group at [Deans Mill School](#). Several of those families said they would be interested in having a Cove Center here. Working towards opening the site, Stefanski even donated the funds of a golf tournament in her husband's honor to the center.

“The Cove Center is near and dear to my heart,” Stefanski said. “They really supported my children and I and I'm happy to have that support come to southeastern Connecticut.”

The Cove Center isn't therapy, but therapeutic peer support where children who are grieving and their families can develop a strong support system. Andersen said she often hears children say “this is the only place I feel safe to express my grief.”

They don't charge for services, each site has a paid site director who is professionally licensed and several trained volunteers. Each program lasts for 22 weeks during which families meet twice a month



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for a couple of hours. The Cove Center asks families to wait at least six weeks after a death before starting the program.

Andersen said they had wanted to open a site in Stonington for a while, but didn't have the funding. The center received a \$15,000 grant from Fosdick Fulfillment where CEO William Pappas agreed to fund the first year. With Stefanski's dedication to bringing the center and raising money locally combined with the generosity of the [Stonington COMO](#), which donated a space, they were able to open a center.

Stefanski introduced Jim Truscio, executive director of the Stonington COMO to the Cove Center's work and for the past year the COMO worked with Stefanski and Andersen to get a center up and running in Stonington.

"There's a need in the area, of course we're going to step up," said Truscio on the decision of the COMO to donate space to the center.

In May, the center will hold a gala in celebration of the new Stonington site and to honor Stefanski's, Pappas's and Truscio's work in getting the site opened.

"It's not all about sadness and grief it's about giving children a voice," Andersen said.

For more information on how you can get involved with The Cove Center For Grieving Children visit their website [www.covect.org](http://www.covect.org) or call 203-634-0500.

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