

# ***RYAN'S PLACE***

## ***KOSCIUSKO COUNTY LEADERSHIP ACADEMY***

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## **RYAN'S PLACE**

In the event of your death, how would the people who love you handle their grief? Jacob draws a picture of his Daddy. The now 5 year old's Daddy left for work one morning in October and never came home. A car accident took his life.

National statistics show that 1 in 8 children will experience the death of a parent before the age of 18. Six out of 10 children will experience the death of someone close before they are out of high school.

There are only 2 facilities in Northern Indiana which cater to grieving children and their families; Ryan's Place in Goshen and Erin's House in Fort Wayne. Both are a non-for-profit center offering free grief support to children and their families in a caring, supportive and confidential manner with a volunteer support staff. All services offered at each facility are free to the entire family on a bi-weekly/bi-monthly basis.

I know a facility like Ryan's Place works and is very beneficial to the community. I know this because Jacob, the 5 year old who draws pictures of his Daddy, is one of my 3 boys who are dealing with the death of their daddy by attending Ryan's Place in Goshen.

The mission of Ryan's Place is to provide support in a safe environment where grieving children, teens and their families can share their experiences as they move through the healing process. A similar mission for Erin's House is to provide support services to promote healing and recovery of children and teens affected by death, through partnerships with schools and community organizations. It is obvious both organizations are geared toward obtaining the same goal: helping children and their families grieve.

How is this done? At Ryan's Place, families meet bi-monthly for a light supper followed by age specific group meetings for the children. There is a spouse session for those who have lost a spouse and a session for those who have suffered the loss of a child. There is also a group set up for "others", those who have lost someone close but do not fit into one of the other categories.

A need for other services to be offered has risen in both agencies. Both now offer an anticipatory grief program as well as a survivor of suicide program. Unfortunately the needs continue to grow and these programs become more necessary for proper healing.

Other activities are set up throughout the year for the families to enjoy: holiday parties, summer picnics, etc. And at no time is a family

asked to contribute financially for any activity for which they are participating.

Which leads into how is this funded? Both are established non-profit agencies. Both Ryan's Place and Erin's House are primarily funded through community funding and support. Corporate donations, foundation funding (grants), in memoriam gifts and special fund raising events are heavily relied upon for support to continue the programs. One or two paid positions are necessary to keep the program on track and organized.

An example of the necessary funding is: \$500 per month provides meals to the families. \$200 per month will supply the children's projects. Training for volunteer facilitators is an average of \$35 per person.

Kosciusko County offers very little in grief counseling services. Hospice offers a 6 week group counseling program approximately 3 or 4 times a year for adults only. A maintenance group which meets once every few months is also offered by Hospice. Children are referred to Ryan's Place in Elkhart County. Hospice has expressed a need for Ryan's Place in our community.

Many, if not all, churches offer free grief counseling on a limited basis. Dr. Gram of WCC reported a need for these services and would encourage the start of a facility in our community.

Ryan's Place is an established agency which has been in existence for 5 years. Therefore, a satellite or branch of Ryan's Place in Kosciusko County would be most beneficial and practical in that the non-profit status and a successful and experienced board of directors are in place. All Kosciusko County needs to ensure the healthy future of our grieving children is to secure a location that is willing to rent or volunteer space to be used, create an advisory board and enlist volunteers. Kosciusko County could then operate under the umbrella of the existing Ryan's Place in Elkhart County

In conclusion Kosciusko County needs established, long term, extensive, non-profit grief counseling in this community. We deserve no less and our children deserve no less than the opportunity to grieve in a supportive and safe environment.

Healthy grieving isn't just important for the bereaved; it is important to the entire community. Research has shown that unresolved grief and the inability of a young person to cope with the death of a loved one plays a significant role in poor school performance, alcohol and drug abuse, depression, anxiety, anger, and an increased risk of suicide.

Today we challenge you, the leaders of this community, to provide much needed grief counseling to our children, thus ensuring a safe and healthy future for the bereaved and for all the people in Kosciusko County.