

lifeline

Bereaved Families of Ontario • Toronto



Healing Through Connections

BFO-Toronto has been helping the healing begin for many of Toronto's underserved communities, agencies, families and individuals for the past four years. This year we are focussing, even more, on sharing what BFO-Toronto has learned about grief in its 28 year history, and learning from others who have their own unique and cultural ways of grieving and dealing with the death of a loved one.

Through knowledge transfer and information sharing we hope to continue to: 1) strengthen the capacity of both community-based organizations and community groups to support grieving youth and their families; 2) build BFO-Toronto's capacity to offer programs and services that are culturally appropriate and come from an anti-racist, anti-oppressive framework.

So far, we have provided training workshops to almost 900 social workers, youth workers, Children's Aid workers, community members, public health nurses, community workers, coming from over 70 different schools, agencies and sectors. We have created a website specifically for bereaved youth where they can find resources and on-line support and we have produced an educational video "Behind Closed Doors – Youth Talk About Grief" that we show to workshop participants. This year, as a result of a grant from the Youth Challenge Fund we will be able to show webcasts, produced by bereaved youth, which will illustrate first hand how youth think about and express their grief.

This Fall, Bereaved Families of Ontario.Toronto will be facilitating a discussion with members of the Black community on how African-Canadian history has impacted the grief experience of their community. The goal of this initiative is to provide an opportunity for the African-Canadian community to recognize and record their inherent strengths when dealing with, and healing from, issues of grief and loss. It will also help to break down barriers and increase understanding within the community of grief and bereavement, so that bereavement support programs become more accessible and culturally appropriate. Another forum is planned on this topic in the Spring of 2008.

Please let us know if we can be of assistance to you, as an individual, or to your agency, organization or community. We are here to help the healing begin.



Soul II Soul

My name is Varun Vig and I'm just a child from the ghetto who's been blessed with the opportunity to be amongst youth who grieve and understand the same pain that I have been enduring these past few years. Up until joining this program I was completely lost, in a world of my own searching for myself, for some peace of mind and somewhere or something to exert my energy towards since so much of it had been lost with me witnessing my best friend getting shot and killed on my birthday of 2005 in the Jane and Finch (Driftwood) community.

Bereaved Families of Ontario.Toronto has become my home away from home. I automatically connected with the youth and staff members of this organization primarily because of the open and welcome arms I received. This group is special to me because I have been able to share my life and everything in it whether good or bad without being judged or looked upon negatively. This is just one of the reasons why I will forever be "In Love" with this program. I primarily wanted to be a part of this program because of the experience and opportunities available within the video and film directing, something I really enjoy and wanted to take in university. Not only am I learning and actually making short movies, something I love doing, more importantly this program helps me stay off the streets where nothing but negativity exists.

I actually look forward to waking up early in the morning to discuss how I'm feeling and what's on my mind. I strive to be on time for our early morning check in and to just be with the people I have learned to know and call my friends. Actually, everyone in this group is considered family to me and it's too bad that the program is only two months. I know everyone wishes it wasn't over so quickly because everyone is having fun. I don't want it to be over because I am having too much fun and I feel like a kid again just being surrounded by these youth who are exactly like me who struggle and strive to make better of their lives even though we are surrounded by drugs, violence and crooked cops. This is the only place I feel comfortable crying and talking about my losses and how I lost more than half my crew before I reached the age of 22. This is the only place I want to be when I wake up in the morning.

Even though I'm still searching for myself in this world realizing it's a constant fight between good and evil the Bereaved Families of Toronto group has helped me put a smile on my face every day since I first step foot into the program and was welcomed by the beautiful Janina Joseph Walker and wonderful Marilyn Ortega. I'm always smiling either because of the supporting staff members that better relate to me or because of the fun that I have filming, acting, eating with and talking to the youth from the program that I can call family or just the fact that this is the handful of places I feel safe and feel loved and understood with all my problems specifically my losses and fear of death. I know that when I cry everyone else cries because we cry together knowing that there is a shoulder to lean on. The ever so friendly environment allows me to control my frustrations with life and keeps my mind from problems and stresses that I'm going through.

This program has also boosted my confidence and self esteem about life, something that had disappeared after witnessing my best friend get murdered on my birthday. The excitement, jokes and skills that we all learned are unforgettable; from receiving special treatment by Universal Studios and The Toronto International Film Festival or the time we ordered Chinese food and it tasted horrible. This program is ideal for all at risk youth who live in communities like mine because a lot of youth don't want to grieve and thus bottle their feelings inside or resort to smoking and drinking constantly or just being in the streets not knowing of the wonderful opportunities like this one where you learn to direct movies and get paid for it at the same time. This group has occupied my time to the utmost positive surroundings and environment possible to a once troubled, hurt, distorted and lost youth.

Every time we meet up we do nothing but laugh, talk and share everything and anything that we encounter in our lives. I am having so much fun directing and filming my movie even though it is an 8 minute segment I get the opportunity to show the world what really happened to my friend when he had been shot by the police in my neighbourhood. I never worked so hard for something that I love doing in my life. Even with Alzheimer's I won't forget the laughs, debates, films we made, and family I have learned to love to come and see each and every morning. The only thing us youth shoot here is movies!

Mission Statement

Bereaved helping the bereaved learn to live with grief. We can help the healing begin.

Values

We are a community of people who value

Compassion

Authentically relating to one another with caring, empathy, openness and acceptance

Understanding

Respecting that while there are common threads that weave themselves among the bereaved, every person learns to live with grief in their own way.

Diversity

Celebrating and embracing the richness of unique and diverse life experiences. Our work must be framed within a context of equity and inclusion.

Mutual Support

Providing mirrors of hope for one another in a safe, supportive and nurturing environment. No one can understand the bereaved like another bereaved person.

Integrity

Creating a safe and reliable space in which to grieve, through honesty and transparency. Our organization must be built on a foundation of mutual trust.

Relationships

Building and sustaining mutually-beneficial connections with members, volunteers, donors and community partners.

Who We Are

BEREAVED FAMILIES OF ONTARIO-TORONTO (BFO-Toronto) is a volunteer-based, bereavement support organization that offers programs and services, based on the mutual support model. We believe that no one understands bereavement as well as someone else who has been there.

Four mothers who came together to share the pain of the death of their children founded Bereaved Families of Ontario, in 1978. It operates within the Province of Ontario through several municipal affiliates, of which Toronto is one. We support bereaved parents, children, youth and adults.

With a membership base of over 1,200 bereaved individuals and over 200 active volunteers, BFO-Toronto has established itself as an organization that provides high caliber programming and support to bereaved individuals and families.

Whether a significant person in someone's life died as a result of illness, accident, murder or suicide, we believe that:

- The deep grief an individual or family feels following a death is natural
- Grief is a unique experience for every person
- Everyone carries within himself or herself the capacity to heal
- Critical to the healing process is a safe place in which to grieve.

BFO-Toronto provides support groups, public education, facilitator training and resources. Trained, bereaved volunteers provide services free of charge. Our websites contain a collection of articles, reading lists, referrals and an interactive message board.

Volunteering at BFO-Toronto

VOLUNTEERS AT BFO-TORONTO ARE BEACONS OF HOPE for the newly bereaved. Being with others who are traveling a similar journey of grief, but are a bit further down the road, is comforting to those who have experienced a death of someone close to them because it helps to normalize the experience of grief.

- Volunteer **peer facilitators** (people who are bereaved themselves) meet with adults for initial one-to-one meetings prior to entering a group and also co-lead our mutual support groups.
- Volunteers, who may or may not have personal bereavement experience, can also answer the telephone, assist in the office and work on our fundraising events.
- Volunteer **professional advisors** (counsellors, teachers & other healthcare and educational professionals) co-lead children's and youth groups and provide support and supervision to peer facilitators in the adult programs.

Our comprehensive and professional training program is offered within a framework of equity and inclusion and provides volunteers with foundational knowledge and skills including the basics of grief & loss, self-awareness and the grief journey and the principals of mutual support. Grief affects us all in unique ways and so we are especially interested in recruiting volunteers that reflect the diversity of life and cultural experiences of people from across Toronto, as well as those who speak languages in addition to English.

Contact information

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bfotoronto.ca
soul2soul.ca

Volunteer training begins October 2007.

Spaces are limited, see enclosed flyer or visit the website at bfotoronto.ca for information on the screening process and list of dates or contact Betty Ann Rutledge at 416-440-0290 ext. 11 or barutledge@bfotoronto.ca