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FSU grant helps Hospice program for grieving youths

The roots of the Caring Tree at Big Bend Hospice are in much better shape today.

Thanks to a new \$20,000 grant from Florida State University's medical school, the local nonprofit's youth bereavement services will be able to help about 300 young people this year who are coping with a loss.

One of Big Bend Hospice's two programs for youth is called Caring Tree, which features group sessions in schools and at other venues. It also provides individual counseling.

"A lot of kids have lost parents or brothers or sisters or significant others. There aren't a lot of resources for them to get help," said Pam Mezzina, bereavement services manager at Big Bend Hospice.

Big Bend Hospice relies heavily on volunteers. It has only one counselor devoted exclusively to young people. Five others serve both youth and adults. There are 30-35 active volunteers with the youth bereavement program, Mezzina said.

Big Bend Hospice hosts monthly children and teen nights plus two summer camps, all of which are free.

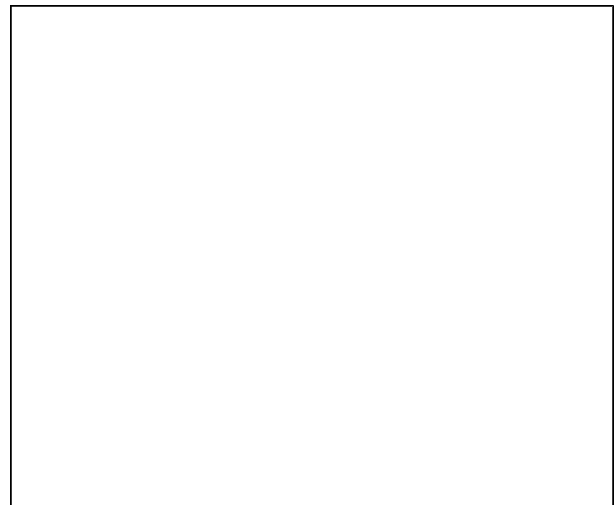
"This College of Medicine grant is a huge deal and a huge help to us to be able to continue this work," Mezzina said. "Part of the money is going specifically to materials that will go to families and young people."

The FSU medical school's gift comes out of the money it received through the annual Dance Marathon, which raises hundreds of thousands of dollars for the Children's Miracle Network, Shands Hospital in Gainesville and FSU's outreach programs.

Dr. Alma Littles, professor of family medicine and rural health at FSU, said the college chose the bereavement services because it fits the college's mission of helping community groups that are not served by the current health care system.


"It's always a great feeling to be able to provide support to someone or some group in the community that you know is supporting a good cause," Littles said. "Big Bend Hospice is one of those excellent partners to be affiliated with."

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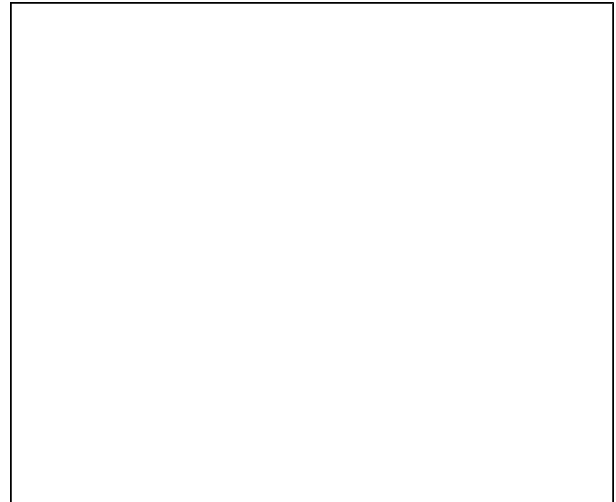
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