

## Empty Arms 2014 Newsletter

### ***Please read on to learn more about our work:***

- Our ongoing Peer Companion work
- Our developing Professional Photography program
- Our future in-service programs to accompany our Companion programs in 2015
- Our participation on Valley Gives Day on December 10<sup>th</sup>
- Our new online community fostered by our *Happenings* page
- Our highly successful professional trainings in 2014
- Our director's conference in San Antonio, Texas

*The fire is going and the wind is whipping fiercely outside my home tonight. The beauty of fall is nearly left behind, and the darkening days remind us that the shortest day is not far off. Thanksgiving, winter holidays, and the dawn of a new year are just around the corner. More milestones and landmarks in 2014, and depending where on the circle you walk in your grief journey, these may be difficult or joyful occasions. As we move towards 2015 we wanted to capture for you some of the work our organization has done in the past year, and will do in the upcoming months.*

*Sending peace,  
Carol*

### **Peer Companion Program**

Our ongoing work in local hospitals has continued, and it's been a privilege to offer our Peer Companion Program at Cooley Dickinson and Franklin Medical Centers. We're looking forward to working with families at the birth center at Holyoke Hospital starting on December 1<sup>st</sup>.

For those of you who aren't familiar with our Peer Companion Program, trained volunteers are called in at the time that a family delivers to offer support. Sometimes that happens before the birth, in helping a family think through decisions, and sometimes it's after the birth, helping staff with memento work and photography. Often, it's both. We assist in whatever way we can to send the family home with their best foot forward and to create a bridge between what we hope will be a positive hospital experience and the Empty Arms community which can continue to provide support after discharge.

### **Professional Photography Program**

We're developing relationships with local professional photographers who will donate their services to accompany peer companions on their hospital visits. When a family requests our support, we will offer professional photographs either with the whole family or of the baby after the family has left. We feel this is will be one of our greatest gifts-- to offer a family the opportunity to take home truly high-quality photographs of their baby at no cost or effort on their part.

## **New Programs for 2015**

In 2015, Empty Arms will be determining ways to offer companion-like services for early loss families. We'd like to create a protocol for doctors' offices, emergency rooms, and day-surgery facilities focused on giving families information about Empty Arms and providing them with peer support at the time of their loss. We'll be reaching out to families in our community who have experienced early pregnancy loss to ask for your feedback and thoughts on how families can best be served in this way.

We will also be researching and strategizing around how we can help local emergency rooms and surgical day care centers to improve their care of early loss patients. Beyond the above mentioned need for peer support, we plan to create change around how early loss families are given information about what is happening with their baby and their body, how they are informed of their choices on how to proceed with a pregnancy that is not viable, and how they are cared for in the aftermath of a miscarriage. We recognize this has been a need for quite some time, and will make it a first priority for the upcoming year.

We're also developing ways our Peer Companion program can offer regular educational opportunities and follow ups in the birth centers we serve. While there's tremendous value in the presence of peer support, the nurses are always going to be the primary caregivers of our families during their hospital stay. To ensure that our families get the best care possible, we're exploring ways to set a regular schedule of trainings and conversations around loss, protocol, and compassionate care. This will also be a priority in the coming year.

## **Fundraising and Valley Gives 2014**

On Wednesday, December 10<sup>th</sup>, Empty Arms is thrilled to be participating in the Pioneer Valley's Valley Gives for the first time. [Valley Gives](#) is a local, online giving campaign that we hope will bolster donor support for the upcoming year. Valley Gives, beyond being an easy medium for individuals to donate to support our work, offers us incentives and prizes on the giving day that will make each dollar donated stretch further than the donation itself. It is our hope to have high participation within our community and beyond to make the most of this opportunity.

To all of our supporters, please join our [Facebook page](#), and stay tuned for more information about how to participate in this incredible opportunity for Empty Arms. Email [emptyarmsbereavement@gmail.com](mailto:emptyarmsbereavement@gmail.com) for more information on how to be involved, spread the word, and even create an individual giving page.

In addition, we were able to run a very successful fundraiser with Erin of Birdie-Bunny photography, and we are so grateful to share with you that Erin is enthusiastic about keeping [our fall Photo Shoot](#) an annual event.

In addition, we were fortunate that Cooley-Dickinson hospital generously sponsored Cathi Lammert, current education director and former executive director of Share,

Pregnancy and Infant Loss, Inc., for her trainings, and we remain grateful to them for their support of the work that we do.

Thank you for the generosity of all our supports who value our work and see its effects on those we service. You allow us to continue to provide support to families in their greatest times of need across the Pioneer Valley.

### **Empty Arms' Happenings**

In the last month, Empty Arms has been incredibly grateful of the parents willing to share their stories on our *Happenings* blog page. Our community's openness to share their story, to learn from each other, and help other families on the road of grief has been truly amazing. If you haven't read the stories, please visit: <http://www.emptyarmsbereavement.org/happenings/>.

### **Professional Trainings in 2014**

Our efforts to educate our community have been successful and extensive in 2014. [Cathi Lammert](#), current education director and former executive director of Share, Pregnancy and Infant Loss, Inc. came in September and offered four trainings in three different locations-- Concord, MA, Greenfield, MA, and Northampton, MA. She was very well received and through Cathi, we continue to make new connections. Doulas who attended Cathi's program have registered to become part of our trained doula referral list, and there were a number of mental health providers who have become part of our referral network. In addition scores of nurses, midwives, and other care providers honed their skills in providing compassionate care to bereaved families. With each recently trained healthcare provider, we hope we are giving the gift of better care to another family, and increasing the probability that those providers will connect their families with our services so that no one will suffer alone and in silence.

As director of Empty Arms, I offer trainings in the Pioneer Valley and throughout Massachusetts. This year, I had the opportunity to speak to the Cambridge Doula program at Cambridge Hospital in Cambridge, and to facilitate a training for the Massachusetts Doula Alliance in Boston. In addition, I speak regularly to nursing students at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and at the American International College in Springfield.

I can't tell you how much I appreciate the opportunity to make clear to these young students the importance of well thought out, compassionate caregiving when a baby dies at any point during pregnancy or after birth. It may surprise you to learn that with the exception of my talk there is often very little education offered to nursing students around how to care for families in situations of perinatal loss. It is always my hope that by asking these students to meet my eye as I share with them real stories from real families that they will recall my words when some day down the road they are faced with a family who is experiencing the death of their baby.

### **Director's Conference in San Antonio, Texas**

To further my own understanding of the population our organization serves, I was fortunate to attend the [Biennial International Perinatal Bereavement Conference](#) in San Antonio, Texas several weeks ago. The wealth of knowledge I acquired at the conference was paralleled only by the value of the relationships I formed with some of the nation and world's experts on miscarriage, end-of-life care for infants, fatal anomalies, emergency room care, and bereaved motherhood. I worked with people who had had extensive experience with adolescent parents, with siblings of terminally ill babies, and with those of a variety of cultures and faiths. I brought home with me a wealth of ideas for how to better our own organization as well as ideas for how to share what I learned with the professionals within our community.

### **Thank you!**

It has been a fulfilling and productive year, and as we look back, I am proud of what we've accomplished. I will close with a quote that I learned in San Antonio -- I have taken the liberty of changing the "I" to "we"-- that grounds me in the work that we do.

*"May we offer our care and presence unconditionally, knowing it may be met with gratitude, indifference, anger or anguish.*

*May we see our own limits with compassion, just as we view the suffering of others.*

*May we be present and let go of expectations*

*May we forgive ourselves for mistakes made and things left undone. "*

We are doing our best to create positive change for families in the Pioneer Valley and beyond who are faced with the unthinkable-- the death of their baby during pregnancy or after birth. May we move into 2015 with positive energy and the commitment to continue to create change and support the many amazing families in our network.