

## Hospice class aids mourners

### Loveland grief counselor leads six-week workshop

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LOVELAND -- Where to start on a new project is an overwhelming concern for some of the students in Amanda Hillman's sacred spaces workshop.

Her students are experiencing grief and loss from the death of a friend or loved one. Every fall and spring, Hillman, a grief counselor and art therapist at Pathways Hospice in Fort Collins, leads the six-week workshop in the facility's art studio to help students memorialize their loved one by creating a sacred space.

The space, such as a box or a picture frame, is something they fill with art and other items -- such as photos, notes, cards and personal mementos -- to express both how they feel and their connection with that person. "A lot of connection happens through the creative process," Hillman said. "It helps them connect to the memories they had before, the happier memories."

Hillman goes over the basics of the various art disciplines the students can use to create their sacred spaces, including painting, drawing, pottery, collage and mixed media. She helps them come up with ideas for their projects based on what is important to them.

As the students work, they learn how to take what they're feeling on the inside and express it externally, shifting or transforming their pain into something else, Hillman said. Their art gives them a way to be reflective in their grief, she said.

The students tap into their vulnerable side and mine out their creativity, said Nancy Jakobsson, director of Pathways for Grief and Loss, a part of Pathways Hospice.

"They discover within themselves they are a creative person," Jakobsson said.

Pathways for Grief and Loss offers workshops and group therapy classes in the visual arts, writing and music to help those who lost a loved one deal with their grief. The community counseling center provides individual therapy, support groups and educational series in the counseling center, which was added to the main facility in 2007.

Loveland poet Veronica Patterson helps direct the two-week-long writing support groups for journaling and Writing Through Loss, where students write to gain insight into their grief, honor the loss and begin to heal. "People use writing as a vehicle of expression as opposed to talk," said Jakobsson.

"It's cathartic as well."

People who experience grief change in the midst of their loss in how they see the world and themselves, Jakobsson said. "Writing gives them insight into what the changes look like," Jakobsson said.

Patterson finds that when people experience a significant loss, they are open "to write vividly and deeply about it," she said.

"It's a time when people are paying an incredible amount of attention to everything in the world," Patterson said. Writing gives people a chance to witness what has happened to them and to remember the person who has died in the fullness of life, not just in death, she said.

"I think the writing course gives people a chance to express their experience and to encompass it," Patterson said. People tell an unconscious story of their lives that loss interrupts, she said. "This gives us a chance to move to the other side of that interruption and say, okay, what's my story now," she said.

Loveland resident Jane Lewis, who took both writing groups, found that writing helped her work through her grief over the loss of her daughter, who died of cancer two years ago.

"Both of them helped because you were allowed to process your loss in your own way," Lewis said. "Capturing where you are helps you see how you're dealing with your grief."

Every five years, Pathways Hospice publishes a collection of the written materials from the writing.