

**MAY 19, 2025**

## **Brighter Days Provides a Soft Landing for the Unimaginable**

### **Losing a child is an indescribable heartbreak, one that no parent should have to endure alone**

Eden Prairie, Minnesota – In a powerful response to this unimaginable pain, Brighter Days Family Grief Center has created Soft Landings, a comprehensive and heartfelt support initiative designed to provide grieving parents with the solace, strength, and community they so desperately need.

With grief often isolating and overwhelming, Soft Landings ensures that newly bereaved parents and their surviving children do not walk this path alone. "No words can truly express the depth of grief a parent experiences," says Carolyn Kinzel, Founder of Brighter Days and the visionary for the Soft Landings program. "What we can do, however, is stand beside them, hold space for their grief, and surround them with continual support through the midst of heartbreak."

Brighter Days has been an anchor in the grief community since 2017, serving Minnesota griever of all ages through their unparalleled model of care, addressing the logistical, financial, and psychosocial aspects of grief. After supporting over 13,000 griever, Kinzel emphasized the staggering void in sustained, intentional support for bereaved parents, something far beyond conventional grief resources. "A counseling session or a grief support group simply is not enough; life doesn't pause between these moments. Time and again, parents have told us that they have had to navigate the depths of their loss alone, struggling through the darkest hours, forcing themselves out of bed, willing themselves to take a bite of food, and somehow finding the strength to return to work. As a statewide grief center, we owe these families more. After eight years of listening to their stories, grasping the full scope of their needs, and laying the foundation to truly support them, we stand ready to not just do better, but to transform the way bereaved parents are supported."

Soft Landings offers accessible, compassionate support through both in-person and virtual programming, ensuring that families are without barriers to care. For six months, the immediate family will receive expert, no-cost support, including grief counseling with master-level professionals. A focus on support for siblings and grandparents, often overlooked in child loss, will also be provided. But the support goes even further. Families will also have access to specialized services from home visits and grief care planning to financial and logistical assistance, as well as anticipatory support for parents confronting the unimaginable reality of a child's terminal diagnosis.

Additionally, Brighter Days will call upon their network of nonprofit community partners that specialize in financial and psychosocial support for grieving parents. Through these collaborations, every family in Soft Landings will not only receive the care they need but will also be seamlessly connected to additional resources, ensuring a compassionate, well-supported transition as they navigate the overwhelming and painful journey of child loss.

One of the most powerful elements of Soft Landings is the incredible network of bereaved parents who have stepped forward, not just to heal, but to help others find their way through the darkness. What began as a small coffee group of griever has grown into a lifeline: monthly gatherings where profound, unbreakable bonds are formed. Many have called these groups lifesaving, a refuge in the depths of loss. Now, several members are going beyond emotional support, not only companionship newly bereaved parents but also forming service teams to provide tangible help, from clearing snow to tending lawns. Their presence, even in silence, carries a message that speaks louder than words: "We see you. We understand. And we will be here whenever you are ready."

Kinzel shared that they have expanded their team, bringing on dedicated professionals whose sole focus is supporting families in this program, ensuring personalized, compassionate care for every parent. "It was essential for us to bring someone in to lead our multi-disciplinary team, who not only possesses deep experience in supporting newly bereaved parents but also carries the heart and compassion that truly reflects our mission. Welcoming Chris Lillehei, Program Manager, to lead this initiative is a moment of great significance for us."

His role will go far beyond logistics; he will personally visit families in their homes, offering comfort and guidance as they navigate one of life's most heartbreaking moments. Through these visits, he will introduce them to the program, ensuring they receive the tailored support they need through the dedicated team members assigned to the family.

Additionally, Chris will serve as a direct liaison to local hospitals, where many of Brighter Days referrals originate. "His presence ensures that families leaving the hospital do not step into the unknown alone. Instead, they will be met with warmth, care, and a reassuring hand to guide them forward, especially during a time when hope feels most out of reach."

Funding for Soft Landings comes from a place of deep personal loss and unwavering commitment. Two remarkable nonprofits, born from their own experiences, have stepped forward to help Brighter Days sustain this vision, determined to ensure grieving families receive the continual support they so desperately need.

For them, the need for this program wasn't just theoretical, it was felt in the raw, endless hours of grief, when even the most basic next steps seemed impossible to grasp. They understood that traditional counseling, while helpful, was not enough on its own. What grieving families needed was a lifeline: a practical, compassionate plan that guided them through the unbearable moments that stretch into eternity, with a clear understanding of what to do, who to call, and where to turn when the weight of loss becomes overwhelming.

Their generosity ensures that Soft Landings can serve as that much-needed safety net, giving parents a tangible source of support in the darkest hours. Their contributions are more than just funding; they are a testament to resilience and empathy.

For Troy and Carina Borca, co-founders of Bryce's Blessings, this program is something they believe every parent deserves. "Bryce's Blessings is honored to partner with Brighter Days Family Grief Center on their new program for grieving parents, Soft Landings. We deeply understand the pain and trauma associated with losing a child after losing our son, Bryce. We fully support the program's mission to provide immediate and ongoing resources to support parents and families during their darkest days. We hope that parents who experience life's most difficult heartbreak find peace in knowing they are not alone while being guided through the early months of their grief."

After hearing about the plans for Soft Landings from Kinzel last year, Pat and Judy Misener, former co-founders of Smile Again Ministries, donated the proceeds of the sale of their lodge to Brighter Days. "The intentional compassion weaved into Soft Landings would have been a tremendous source of support and comfort for us as bereaved parents. We feel certain that Carolyn and her team will continue our vision of supporting grieving parents and their families into the future."

If you would like to donate to Brighter Days as a supporter of the Soft Landings program, please contact Carolyn Kinzel, Executive Director, at 952.219.8512

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#### About Brighter Days Family Grief Center

Brighter Days Family Grief Center is a Minnesota nonprofit dedicated to helping families navigate the pain of loss. Through compassionate, no-cost grief support, resources, and programs, they provide vital assistance to individuals of all ages facing the death or terminal illness of a loved one. Their holistic model, offering logistical, emotional, and financial assistance, is unmatched in the state. Since the inception in 2017, Brighter Days has served over 13,000 people and granted over \$100,000 in financial assistance to support grieving children and adults.