



Katy Armendariz
Founder & Visionary, LICSW
Roots Wellness Center

Katy Armendariz, LICSW, is the founder of Roots Wellness Center, established in 2013 to provide culturally affirming mental health, substance use, and parenting support services for children, families, and adults. Drawing from her own lived experience and deep community roots, Katy recognized early on the critical importance of trauma informed, culturally rooted, somatic and holistic services delivered by BIPOC providers—those who not only reflect the communities they serve, but also practice through a justice-informed, advocacy-centered lens and focus on challenging the western mental health industrial complex. Over the years, Roots Wellness Center has expanded to offer a wide range of services, including in-home therapy, ARMHS, CTSS, Children's Day Treatment, Targeted Case Management, Pretrial Navigation, be@school case management, and a holistic, culturally grounded Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) for substance use recovery. In 2017, she launched Roots Recovery IOP, a harm-reduction, social justice-oriented program designed

to support parents living with substance use conditions. Katy is also committed to transforming the broader field of social work. Roots Wellness Center offers continuing education workshops that address historical trauma, cultural humility, activism, and countering white cultural dominance. Her trainings center culturally rooted, trauma-informed, anti-oppressive practices that challenge the status quo in behavioral health systems.

"From Collective Grief to Collective Liberation: Healing Shared Trauma in Communities Under Stress"
60-minute In-Person Lunch Keynote

- **Description:**
 - Communities today are experiencing profound layers of collective grief shaped by violence, systemic inequities, political upheaval, and community-wide trauma. In Minnesota, events such as mass violence, immigration enforcement actions, and highly publicized tragedies—including the deaths of Renée Good and Alex Pretti and the Annunciation church shooting—have reverberated deeply across communities, leaving lasting emotional and psychological impacts. These events illustrate how grief is not only an individual experience following the death of a loved one, but also a shared, collective emotional response that affects entire communities, systems, and institutions. This keynote explores collective grief through the lens of trauma neuroscience, community psychology, and culturally rooted healing practices. Drawing from community mental health work and research on the nervous system, the presentation examines how grief manifests in complex ways—including anger, rage, fear, and social fragmentation—and how these responses reflect deeper collective trauma. Participants will learn how culturally grounded practices, nervous system regulation, and community connection can help individuals and communities move from collective trauma toward collective healing. Rather than focusing solely on coping with suffering, the keynote highlights how healing practices rooted in community care, cultural wisdom, and nervous system safety can restore connection, resilience, and collective well-being.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Define collective grief and describe how community-wide traumatic events influence individual grief responses and community well-being.
 - Recognize how grief responses may manifest physiologically and emotionally—including anger, rage, hypervigilance, and shutdown—within communities experiencing layered trauma.
 - Describe the role of the nervous system in trauma and grief responses, including the relevance of polyvagal theory and vagus nerve regulation in restoring safety and connection.
 - Identify culturally responsive and community-based approaches that support collective healing and resilience following shared trauma.
 - Apply practical strategies that grief professionals can use in clinical, educational, and community settings to support individuals navigating layered and collective grief.

***Presenters are subject to change as the schedule is in development.*



Nicole Barnes

*LICSW, Director of Bereavement
Brighter Days Family Grief Center*

Nicole Barnes, LICSW, is an experienced social worker and program leader with more than twenty-five years in healthcare, grief support, and community-based services. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work from the College of St. Scholastica, a Master of Arts in Social Work from the University of Minnesota, and a Master of Arts in Health Care and Nonprofit Administration from St. Mary's University. Nicole is a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker and a certified yoga instructor. Her career includes extensive work across hospitals, emergency room, and nonprofit settings, along with program development and leadership roles that have strengthened care transitions, integrated social work services, and enhanced support for diverse communities. Nicole is currently the Director of Bereavement at Brighter Days Family Grief Center after a recent

transition from her role as Program Manager with Park Nicollet's Growing Through Grief Program. Her leadership includes designing curriculum, facilitating training, managing budget, and maintaining partnerships across multiple school districts and community partners. Throughout her career, she has successfully scaled innovative programs, secured grant funding, and advanced quality improvement efforts within healthcare and school systems. Her work has been recognized with the Park Nicollet Partner for Good Award. Outside of her professional life, Nicole enjoys spending time with her husband, adult children, and grandson, walking her lab, practicing hot yoga, and hiking in the summer months.

"Supporting Grieving Students in the School Setting and Beyond"

60-minute In-Person & Virtual Workshop

- **Description:**
 - 95% of educators report wanting to help grieving students, but less than 7% have received any bereavement training. This session shows you what grief actually looks like in schools, what to say (and what not to say) when supporting grieving students, and five practical strategies that work—no certification required. You'll leave with tools to support individual students and build collective capacity in school communities navigating loss.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Identify grief responses in school-aged children across developmental stages (ages 5-18) and distinguish between normal grief reactions and behaviors requiring additional intervention.
 - Apply five evidence-based, trauma-informed strategies for supporting grieving students in educational settings without requiring specialized grief counseling training.
 - Evaluate when to provide in-school support versus when to connect families to external grief support services, and implement a referral process that removes barriers for families.

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Heather Boeser
Therapist, LICSW
InMind Health

Heather Boeser, LICSW, is a therapist in Minnesota at InMind Health (Chaska and Eagan) whose work centers on cancer, grief, serious illness, and the spaces where loss and meaning meet. She integrates clinical approaches with nervous system-informed practices to support healing. Mindfulness is a steady thread in her work, offering patients simple ways to return to the present moment. A trained labyrinth facilitator through Veriditas, Heather has been walking labyrinths for over two decades and shares them as a gentle, accessible walking mindfulness practice.

“Step Onto the Path: Labyrinth Walking for Grief and Gentle Renewal”

60-minute In-Person Workshop

- **Description:**
 - This workshop offers a gentle introduction to the labyrinth as a reflective walking practice for grief. We will briefly explore its history and clinical applications, followed by an opportunity to walk the labyrinth with simple guidance and time for quiet reflection. Created for clinicians, caregivers, and anyone carrying loss, this experience invites you to step out of the role of holding others and into a space of tending to yourself.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Describe the labyrinth as a therapeutic tool, including its historical context and contemporary applications in grief work.
 - Explain how labyrinth walking may support emotional processing and self-regulation in grief, including benefits for caregiver well-being.
 - Apply foundational principles of labyrinth use through participation in a guided walk and reflective integration.

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Dr. Jim Bueche

DNP, APRN, AG-CNSPHN

Founder of Midland Hills CARES

Dr. Bueche has spent a lifetime caring. He currently works as a nurse in advanced therapy, LVAD, and transplant.

Following the loss of his father at an early age, his focus has come full circle to have end of life care.

Still with a central focus of family and community, Dr. Bueche has come to witness and hold the grace that can accompany dying – as, potentially, our most healing modality.

“Ash to Ash – Dying into Life”

60-minute Virtual Workshop

- **Description:**

- As a cardiac nurse in advanced therapy, LVAD and transplant, only our best care is possible when dying as an action of life is included.

In this session, attendees will learn how the Ash tree can be used as a metaphor for what can be built from loss and in remembrance of the life that was.

- **Learning Objectives:**

- Participants will learn the idea of complimentary care in advanced illness.
- Participants will learn how art can serve as a partner in the grief process.
- Participants will learn a variety of approaches to discuss end of life fears and wishes with patients and their families.



Molly Darsow

*Mediator, MS, Qualified Neutral Rule 114
Still Waters Mediation, LLC*

Molly Darsow has a strong background in counseling and group facilitation, providing a compassionate, professional, and insightful approach to mediation. She has extensive experience helping individuals and groups navigate dynamics, manage complex emotions, clarify their values, and achieve their goals.

Molly is a qualified neutral under Rule 114 of the Minnesota General Rules of Practice. She is an active volunteer mediator with the Dispute Resolution Center and a board member of the Alternative Dispute Resolution section of the MN State Bar Association.

Molly holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Hamline University, with a focus on Conflict Studies, as well as a Master of Science in Human Services. Additionally, she has a Master's certificate in

Addiction Counseling from Winona State University. Molly is licensed by the Minnesota Board of Education and is a voluntarily retired licensee from the Minnesota Board of Behavioral Health.

“Staying Neutral in a Charged Room: Supporting Families When Values Collide”

60-minute In-Person Workshop

- **Description:**
 - When families gather to make caregiving or end of life decisions, grief is rarely the only force in the room. Deeply held values, political identities, religious beliefs, and collective stress often surface alongside personal loss. For professionals facilitating these conversations, the challenge is not to resolve ideological differences but to remain steady, balanced, and effective when emotions and values collide.

Drawing from her mediation practice with adult siblings and multigenerational families navigating aging parent and end of life conflict, Molly Darsow explores what neutrality truly means in the context of grief and polarization. Participants will learn how to recognize when values based tension is amplifying grief, how to validate competing emotional truths without taking sides, and how to structure conversations that reduce escalation and increase psychological safety.

This session provides practical, mediation informed tools that professionals can immediately apply in hospice settings, counseling sessions, educational environments, clergy work, and family meetings.

- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Identify communication patterns that signal values-based conflict layered onto personal grief.
 - Demonstrate validation techniques that acknowledge multiple perspectives without reinforcing polarization.
 - Apply structured facilitation strategies to maintain neutrality and psychological safety during emotionally charged family conversations.

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Dr. Kierst Finsand
Clinical Director & Supervisor
CARE Counseling

&

Alice LiuXia
Clinical Director
CARE Counseling



Kierst Finsand, Psy.D., LP is a licensed psychologist, clinical director and clinical supervisor at CARE Counseling. Dr. Finsand received her doctorate in psychology at the University of St. Thomas and has worked in various clinical settings including The Emily Program, Fischler & Associates as well as Counseling and Psychological Services at the University of St. Thomas. For the past decade, Dr. Finsand has done clinical work and research in the areas of ambiguous grief. Dr. Finsand has delivered professional training presentations on topics including grief, eating and body image concerns, resilience, and mental health wellness.

Alice LiuXia, LADC, LPCC, is a behavioral health professional and community presenter who delivers engaging presentations on topics including emotional intelligence, life transitions and change, anxiety, depression, grief, trauma, and culturally appropriate care in substance use disorder (SUD) treatment. Her professional background includes work in outpatient mental health and substance use settings, where she has supported diverse adult populations navigating complex life challenges. This experience informs her practical, accessible approach to training, helping audiences translate concepts into real-world application. Alice brings a culturally responsive lens to her work and is especially passionate about supporting individuals from minority communities in exploring identity, belonging, and self-worth. Alice's approach is grounded in the belief that people are doing the best they can with what they know, and that growth begins with increased awareness and intentional change.

"When What We Thought Was Secure Shifts: Ambiguous Loss, Relational Grief, and Community Connection in Times of Sociocultural Change"

60-minute In-Person Workshop

- **Description:**
 - Periods of sociocultural and environmental change often reveal fractures in relationships once experienced as secure, shared, or aligned. This presentation explores ambiguous loss and grief that arise when individuals discover that the beliefs, values, or worldviews of loved ones differ from what was previously perceived—altering one's sense of safety, connection, and relational identity. Drawing on research related to ambiguous loss and sociopolitical stress, the session examines how these relational disruptions compound the broader grief experienced amid community-level upheaval. Participants will gain a framework for understanding this often-unrecognized grief and practical approaches for supporting meaning-making, validation, and relational boundary-setting in clinical practice.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Define ambiguous loss as it applies to relational and psychological grief that emerges when perceptions of safety, shared values, or identity within relationships change.
 - Identify how sociocultural and environmental events (e.g., politics, social unrest, public health crises) can activate layered grief through relational disconnection and altered meaning-making.
 - Describe the emotional and clinical impact of discovering divergent beliefs, values, or worldviews in significant relationships and how this compounds community-level loss.
 - Apply trauma- and grief-informed clinical strategies to support individuals navigating ambiguous relational loss alongside broader communal grief.

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Rosie Gaston
*End-of-Life Social Worker
Researcher, Educator.
MSW, LICSW, APHSW-C
A Better Ending*

&

Zac Willette
*Board Certified Chaplain
Leadership Consultant
MDiv, BCC; Hospice Care,
Compassionate Leadership*



Zac and Rosie both help people navigate grief, death, and healing with connection and compassion. Zac Willette is a board-certified spiritual care provider, teacher, and writer who has accompanied thousands through sickness, death, and healing in trauma centers, ICUs, and hospice settings. His work spans national roles with major health systems and healthcare startups, where he has helped advance conversations about death and dying across the country — plus sojourns in Antarctica and Bolivia. Rosie Gaston is an end-of-life social worker, researcher, and educator who discovered her calling while volunteering at a hospice in her 20s. Drawing on her own experiences with significant loss as a teenager and young adult, she has spent nearly a decade in healthcare — including palliative care, oncology,

and hospice settings — developing expertise in facilitating difficult conversations, advocating fiercely for patients and families, and holding space for grief. Together, they work to transform how we approach end-of-life care by centering person-centered values, collective action on those values, and deep human connections that endure. Rosie's desire to “go deeper, do more, and do better” led her to found A Better Ending, while Zac's work studying burnout and teaching stamina showcases Robin Wall Kimmerer's truth that all thriving is mutual. Both these leaders bring decades of experience, active compassion, and a profound respect for the complexity and preciousness of life to everything they do.

“When Grief Is Everywhere: Holding on Without Giving Up”

60-minute In-Person Afternoon Presentation

- **Description:**

- Working in the grief field means holding space for suffering and loss, truth and pain, hope and love — often all in the same moment. It's no wonder so many in our field feel stretched thin to the point of giving up. Burnout isn't a personal weakness; it's a predictable consequence of caring deeply in very demanding systems during very demanding times. Drawing on research from the Nagoski sisters and other leading scholars, this keynote acknowledges burnout as both an individual and systemic phenomenon while focusing on what we can actually do to sustain ourselves within it — especially when layered and collective grief weighs us down in ways we may not even know. Through a dynamically-presented “day in the life” case study of a grief clinician, participants will explore how stress shows up in their own bodies and learn to identify their own stress cycle triggers. This interactive presentation then emphasizes implementation, engaging participants real-time in evidence-based tools such as breathing, movement, self-compassion, and connection, while offering concrete, actionable ways to integrate these practices into their already-full daily life. Attendees will leave equipped with practical resources and a renewed sense of agency to build stamina so they can continue showing up not just for the patients, families, and teams who rely on them — but also, importantly, for themselves.

- **Learning Objectives:**

- Personally and professionally identify how early burnout, collective grief, and both individual and systemic factors contribute to stress and compassion fatigue in their grief-profession settings.
- Directly apply a research-informed understanding of the stress cycle to not only recognize personal stress triggers but also practice (during the session!) techniques for completing the cycle.
- Immediately implement evidence-based tools to foster stamina, connection, and sustained well-being in both personal and professional practice.

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Kelly Grosklags

LICSW, BCD, FAAGC, FT

Conversations with Kelly

Kelly Grosklags, LICSW, BCD, FAAGC, FT, is a highly renowned expert and compassionate clinical psychotherapist in the areas of oncology, palliative care and hospice. With close to three decades of experience, she has dedicated her life to supporting patients, families, and healthcare providers on their healing journeys, offering solace and guidance through grief and end-of-life care. The founder of *Conversations with Kelly*, an online and live interactive speaking engagement platform, Kelly is also an executive producer, author, and international speaker who embodies the art of compassionate communication through transformative guidance, supporting and empowering medical professionals and patients during times of serious illness, grief, and loss. Kelly's greatest teachers have been her patients, teaching her what matters most.

"Bearing Witness: The Impact of Cumulative Grief on Those Who Serve the Bereaved"

60-minute In-Person Workshop

- **Description:**

- Those who serve grieving families often witness profound loss on a daily basis. Funeral directors, chaplains, hospice professionals, death doulas, healthcare workers, clergy, and others in helping professions are repeatedly exposed to death, sorrow, trauma, and heartbreak. While supporting others is meaningful work, these experiences accumulate over time and can have a significant impact on personal well-being and professional effectiveness.

This workshop explores the often-overlooked reality of cumulative grief and its effect on those who walk alongside others during some of life's most difficult moments. Participants will gain insight into the emotional, physical, and spiritual toll of repeated loss exposure, learn to recognize signs of grief overload and compassion fatigue, and discover practical strategies for sustaining themselves while continuing to provide compassionate care. Special attention will be given to the unique experiences of funeral professionals and chaplains, whose roles place them at the intersection of death, grief, and ongoing service to others.

- **Learning Objectives:**

- Define cumulative grief and identify its emotional, physical, spiritual, and professional impact on individuals who regularly support families following a death.
- Recognize common signs of grief overload, compassion fatigue, and emotional exhaustion that can develop through repeated exposure to loss and bereavement.
- Implement practical strategies for acknowledging, processing, and integrating grief in ways that promote resilience, professional longevity, and compassionate care.

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Damaris Hernández

Author, Certified Emotion Code Practitioner

Damaris Emotion Code

Damaris Hernández is the author of *Voices of Empathy*, a Certified Emotion Code Practitioner, and a speaker dedicated to helping individuals and communities heal from grief and emotional trauma. After experiencing the profound loss of her husband, Damaris transformed her personal journey through grief into a mission of service—guiding others to understand how emotions, when left unresolved, can remain trapped in the body and affect both emotional and physical wellbeing. Through empathy-centered practices and emotional release techniques, she teaches practical tools that help people move from emotional pain toward healing and resilience.

Through her speaking, workshops, and healing practice, Damaris creates spaces where people feel safe to explore grief, reconnect with their emotional strength, and begin releasing the burdens they have carried for years. She works with individuals, youth, and community groups to promote emotional awareness and healing, including ongoing work with Hispanic youth at Centro Tyrone. Her work blends personal story, practical tools, and compassionate guidance to help others transform grief into connection, hope, and renewed purpose—guided by her mission to make empathy simple, presence powerful, and comfort possible.

“The Invisible Weight of Collective Grief How Shared Trauma Lives in Our Bodies—and How We Begin to Heal”

60-minute Virtual Workshop

- **Description:**
 - Collective grief and trauma do not live only in our memories or our hearts—they often live in our bodies. In this interactive and educational session, author of *Voices of Empathy* and Emotion Code practitioner Damaris Hernández teaches practical techniques to identify and release trapped emotions so people and communities can move from shared trauma toward healing and resilience. This hands-on session introduces the concept of trapped emotions and offers accessible tools to support emotional healing. Attendees will also experience a brief guided practice that demonstrates how emotional release techniques can support healing in real time. By the end of the session, participants will have a deeper understanding of emotional wellness and practical strategies to help transform collective grief into connection, resilience, and hope.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Identify how collective grief and trauma can manifest as “trapped emotions” in the body and influence emotional and physical wellbeing.
 - Explain the concept of trapped emotions and how unresolved emotional experiences may contribute to prolonged grief and stress responses.
 - Demonstrate practical techniques for recognizing and beginning to release emotional burdens in order to support individual and community healing.

***Presenters are subject to change as the schedule is in development.*



Dr. Fiyyaz Karim
Senior Lecturer
University of Minnesota

Dr. Fiyyaz Karim (he/him/his) is a Senior Lecturer in the Master of Professional Studies programs in Integrated Behavioral Health and Addictions Counseling at the University of Minnesota. Before entering higher education, Dr. Karim worked extensively in community mental health outpatient settings, serving diverse and marginalized populations. He currently serves as a community consultant and regularly facilitates professional trainings and workshops on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) topics including microaggressions, implicit bias, cultural appropriation, and identity development.

His clinical and research interests center on trauma, grief, and loss, with particular attention to disenfranchised losses such as unemployment, relationship dissolution, chronic illness, addiction,

and more recently, losses related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Karim also contributes to the broader community through his service on the Board of Directors of Agate Housing and Services and as a member of the Governor's Advisory Council on Opioids, Substance Use, and Addiction.

"Weathering Loss Together: Navigating Ecological Grief In Our Community "
60-minute In-Person & Virtual Workshop

- **Description:**
 - Explore how climate change and environmental degradation are shaping our collective emotional landscape and community well-being in this engaging session. Drawing on contemporary grief and community frameworks, this session will introduce the concept of ecological grief, highlight how it intersects with trauma, disenfranchised loss, and systemic inequities, and illustrate its impact across the lifespan and in marginalized communities. Participants will engage with case examples and reflective dialogue to identify signs of community and ecological grief in their own contexts and to explore practical, community-based strategies, such as ritual, eco-therapy, and collective action, to foster connection, resilience, and renewed hope.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Examine the psychological, social, and ecological facets of collective grief stemming from environmental loss and climate change.
 - Evaluate ecological grief's effects on community dynamics, institutional responses, and support networks.
 - Implement community-driven approaches to build shared resilience, healing, and adaptation amid ecological disruption and loss.

***Presenters are subject to change as the schedule is in development.*



JC Lippold

*Situational Leadership & Hogan Personality
Certified, Leadership & Change Consultant,
Director People & Partnerships - Cadre*

JC likes to think he follows in his mother's footsteps as a professional homemaker holding space for others as a nationally renowned teacher of movement and mindset, community engager and social movement trailblazer, storyteller and musical theatre director. Born and raised in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, JC entered the world as a highly emotional, unathletic child with little interest in competition. Through trials and tribulations, mile runs and middle school gym classes, JC started to question the rationale behind our culture's use of physical experiences that leave most feeling less than enough. JC earned a BA in Theology and Master's Degree in Leadership, is a 1 Giant Mind Certified Meditation facilitator and holds credentials across many modalities of movement.

The founder of **5K Everyday Conversations**, a social movement designed to create access for all to daily conversation with strangers & **TCO Local**, monthly all are needed, all are capable connection events, JC is passionate about redesigning the fitness landscape in the United States to where the target audience is: everyone. As a brand ambassador and consistent positive friction voice, JC works alongside brands like lululemon, CorePower Yoga, [solidcore], Orangetheory Fitness, allbirds and Fitbit to ensure they continuously explore ways they can shift the exclusionary and shame-inducing realities of the wellness industry to a more sustainable, happiness and health-giving part of our culture and economy. For the past 18 months, JC has been a part of an inspiring team of people conducting and presenting the first comprehensive research on Food, Body & Fitness Shaming. Alongside his work in fitness, JC is a full time Leadership and Change consultant working alongside Fortune 500 companies, non-profits, civic and educational communities. JC also serves as the Director of People & Partnerships for Cadre, the all-in-one mental health and wellness platform that brings content and community together. You can often find JC on the Twin Cities' ABC syndicate, KSTP-TV as their wellness expert. JC leads workshops and is writing the seminal text on his concept of Enoughness, the empowering practice of affirming that you are already, indeed enough.

"The Connection Formula: Felt, Thought and Seen"

60-minute In-Person Welcome Presentation

- **Description:**
 - When people gather in community, a special attendee appears. Synergy.
It is often felt more than it is seen or heard and because of this, it can often be left to one's wonderings rather than named and utilized as a galvanizing tool for healing and connection. JC will offer tactical and practical tools and musings for the heads, hearts and hands in the room. The synergetic stirring of this hour will prepare you for the day ahead.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Attendees will learn the Connection Formula and how to implement it in meaningful ways for groups of all sizes.
 - Attendees will be able to utilize the shared tools to help others navigate change.
 - Attendees will be able to name the four calibrating arms of Enoughness and use them to help one's self and others practice Enoughness.

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Kathleen Massmann

PhD, LPCC, FT, IPPE-C, CPLC, CEO

Healing Moments Counseling

Kathleen Massmann holds a Ph.D. in Advanced Studies in Human Behavior with a research focus on Stillbirth and Posttraumatic Growth. She is a fellow in Thanatology. Kathleen works as a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor in the area of pregnancy loss, infant loss, and pregnancy after loss. She is an international speaker on topics associated with perinatal loss and thanatology. In addition to her clinical work, Kathleen contributes to professional education and research on bereavement care and maternal wellbeing. Her work emphasizes honoring grief, fostering resilience, and helping families find meaning and connection after loss. After experiencing the unexplained loss of her son Jacob in 2011, she has become an advocate for promoting competent and compassionate bereavement care to parents and families who have experienced the loss of a child.

"Bearing Witness: The Courage to Grieve Publicly"

60-minute In-Person & Virtual Workshop

- **Description:**

- The glow of flickering candles gathers on a street corner. On the sidewalk, strangers embrace in silence, and flowers fill the courtyard of a school. In this shared moment, grief becomes visible and undeniable. Grief is no longer private; it's public, it's communal, and sometimes it's politicized. We now live in a world where tragedy is on every screen, on every platform, and collective trauma unfolds right before our eyes. When grief is ignored, minimized, or rushed, people and communities risk fracture. We will explore what happens when individuals and communities are told to move on, and how disenfranchised grief can impact our lives at both the micro and macro levels. Conversely, when grief is acknowledged and witnessed, long-term healing can follow. Today, we will explore the importance of bearing witness to tragedy and validating the grief that accompanies it. There is incredible power in shared spaces for mourning and remembrance. Participants will explore why validation—naming loss, acknowledging pain, and honoring memory—is not symbolic but healing. It affirms our shared humanity! At its heart, this session reframes grief not as weakness or disruption, but as evidence of care. Public validation does not prolong suffering; it prevents isolation. Shared spaces do not reopen wounds; they create containers strong enough to hold them.

- **Learning Objectives:**

- **Normalize Collective Grief:** Articulate the difference between individual grief and collective grief; recognize the importance of social validation as a protective factor against isolation and stigmatization.
- **Understand Consequences of Unacknowledged Loss:** Identify the psychological & social costs of disenfranchised grief; describe how suppressed communal mourning contributes to polarization, burnout, and mistrust.
- **Explain the Science of Shared Mourning:** Summarize how trauma affects nervous systems collectively (co-regulation, emotional contagion); connect ritual and communal acknowledgment to psychological stabilization.
- **Design Intentional Communal Spaces:** Identify principles for creating safe, inclusive public mourning spaces

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Amy McClure

PhD in Sociology, Certificate in Gender Studies

Associate Professor of Sociology, Rollins College

Amy I. McClure, Ph.D., is a sociologist who studies how identity and social structures shape the way we move through life's most vulnerable moments. She is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, where her scholarship connects everyday interactions to broader systems of power. Her work examines how people construct meaning and belonging within contested social worlds, with particular attention to gender, family, secularism, and the sociology of emotions. For more than two decades, she has conducted qualitative research examining how individuals navigate stigma and moral judgment, illuminating how inequality operates through everyday social life. She has published in peer-reviewed journals including *Qualitative Sociology* and *Secularism and Nonreligion*, and she is currently preparing to teach the sociology course *Death, Dying, and Bereavement*. Beyond her

scholarship, Amy's engagement with death and grief is also personal. She cared for her husband through in-home hospice and became a widow during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, experiencing personal loss within a broader landscape of collective trauma and disrupted communal rituals. She serves on the LIGHT Family Caregiver National Advisory Council and has trained as a grief facilitator for children experiencing profound loss. Her work calls professionals to recognize that grief is never merely individual—it is relational, structured, and shaped by inequality, influenced by gender, race, class, sexuality, and religious belief, particularly in moments of shared societal upheaval.

"Grieving Unequally: A Sociological Lens on Identity, Power, and Recognition"

60-minute In-Person & Virtual Workshop

- **Description:**

- Grief is often described as universal. Yet the conditions under which individuals care, lose, mourn, and receive validation are profoundly shaped by social inequality. Gendered caregiving expectations, racialized exposure to premature death, economic precarity, heteronormative assumptions, and religious privilege all influence how grief is experienced, expressed, and publicly recognized. This presentation introduces a sociological framework for understanding grief as socially structured rather than purely individual or psychological. Drawing on research in gender and emotional labor, racial inequality and cumulative loss, social class and resource disparities, sexuality and disenfranchised grief, and secularism and religious privilege, this session examines how grief unfolds within systems of power. Particular attention will be given to the caregiver-to-bereaved transition, racialized collective trauma, economic constraints on mourning, LGBTQ+ recognition and invisibility, and the interactional pressures toward religious meaning-making in pluralistic societies. Attendees will gain tools for recognizing how inequality intensifies both personal and collective grief, identifying structural stressors that may be misinterpreted as individual pathology, and incorporating a more contextually grounded lens into professional practice. By situating grief within its broader social landscape, professionals can better validate diverse experiences of loss and respond with greater cultural, structural, and interactional awareness.

- **Learning Objectives:**

- Explain how gender, race, class, sexuality, and secularism shape grief experiences and access to validation.
- Identify structural factors that intensify individual and collective bereavement.
- Describe how caregiving labor and identity transitions influence post-loss adjustment.
- Recognize religious privilege and heteronormative assumptions embedded in grief discourse.
- Apply a sociological framework to enhance culturally and structurally responsive grief support practices.

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Kevin O'Connor

MS, Ed.D., Author, Speaker, Grief Educator

The Grief Navigator – Grief Education & Support

Kevin O'Connor is the creator of The Grief Navigator, an author, speaker, and former educator with more than four decades of experience working with individuals and families. He is the author of *Two Floors Above Grief*, a memoir drawn from growing up in a third-floor apartment above his family's funeral home, where grief was part of everyday life.

Kevin leads presentations and conversations that help people understand and navigate loss in practical, meaningful ways. His work bridges lived experience with professional insight, offering guidance to those who support others through grief.

"Growing Up Inside Collective Grief"

60-minute Virtual Workshop

- **Description:**
 - Collective grief is often framed around large-scale events—mass violence, pandemics, and community trauma. But for many, grief does not arrive all at once. It builds over time, shaped by repeated exposure to loss, both personal and shared. I grew up in a third-floor apartment above my family's funeral home. Grief was not something we visited—it was something we lived alongside. It came through our doors daily, carried by families, shaped by community, and expressed in ways that were both visible and unspoken. In this session, I draw from that lived experience, along with decades of family letters and my professional work in education and grief support, to explore how collective grief takes root and how it continues to shape individuals, families, and communities. Much of what we now understand about grief reminds us that it is not something to "get over," but something we learn to live with. That perspective, reflected in the work of Megan Devine and David Kessler, and supported through communities like Grief2Growth, GriefShare, and What's Your Grief, mirrors what I witnessed growing up—grief as a continuing presence, not a problem to solve. Participants will explore how shared community loss intersects with individual grief experiences, and how layered grief shows up in the people they serve. The session offers practical ways to recognize collective grief and respond with approaches that are compassionate, grounded, and immediately applicable in clinical, educational, and death care settings.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Define collective grief and distinguish it from individual grief using examples from lived experience and professional practice.
 - Recognize at least three ways collective grief presents in individuals and communities, including its influence on behavior, relationships, and meaning-making.
 - Apply at least two practical approaches for responding to collective grief in professional settings, integrating both personal and shared loss experiences.

***Presenters are subject to change as the schedule is in development.*



Patricia Sheveland

RN, PCC

Founder of Confident Grief Coach School

Pat Sheveland RN, PCC, is a professionally certified life coach through the International Coaching Federation (ICF), the founder and lead faculty of The Confident Grief Coach School, a mentor coach and small business coach to servant-hearted entrepreneurs. Her organization provides coaching certification training and mentoring for coaches. Her background as a nurse, grief coach and corporate executive brings a unique blend of coaching to her clients seeking personal or small business transformation. She is a certified funeral celebrant, and the three-time Amazon best-selling author of *How Do I Survive? 7 Steps to Living After Child Loss*, *Living Life in The Middle: The Caregiver's Guide to Healing, Hope and Harmony Through Multigenerational Living* and *The Confident Grief Coach: A Guide for Helping Clients Process Loss*

and a long-time volunteer with the non-profit Healing Hearts Connection organization. She and her husband live in Minnesota.

"Learning to BREATHE When Communities Grieve"

60-minute Virtual Workshop

- **Description:**
 - In the wake of community tragedy, whether sudden loss, disaster or collective trauma, grief is not experienced in isolation. Yet, the systems designed to support healing are often fragmented, leaving individuals, families and communities navigating disconnected services across disciplines.

This workshop introduces a collaborative model of grief care, bringing together grief professionals, including therapists/counselors, coaches, death doulas, spiritual leaders, healing arts practitioners and community organizations into an integrated ecosystem of support.

Participants will learn how to move beyond siloed approaches and into coordinated, compassionate collaboration that better serves communities in crisis and long-term healing.

Grounded in Patricia Sheveland's B.R.E.A.T.H.E. Coaching Model for Grief™, this session offers both a visionary framework and practical tools to implement immediately.

- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Recognize gaps and risks in fragmented grief care systems for collective grief events
 - Learn a collaborative framework for integrated grief support for communities
 - Develop an actionable plan to build or strengthen local grief care networks within your community

***Presenters are subject to change as the schedule is in development.*



Dr. Theresa B. Skaar
Ph.D, Speaker & Facilitator
Skaar and Company, LLC

"Dr. Theresa B. Skaar (Dr. T) is a social psychologist and mindfulness-based speaker who offers practical tools to help people stay grounded when life gets hard. Her work focuses on the real experiences people navigate every day, including stress, grief, aging, communication, and life transitions. With more than 35 years of experience across healthcare, corporate environments, and academia, she blends research, lived experience, and storytelling to support individuals and professionals in responding to challenges with greater awareness and clarity.

Certified in mind-body medicine and a qualified instructor of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Dr. T brings a calm, grounded presence to conversations people often avoid. Her sessions combine research, reflection, and simple, practical tools

that audiences can apply immediately in their work and lives, helping them pause, reconnect, and respond more intentionally to what's in front of them."

"Collective Grief: Responding to Shared Loss with Presence"

60-minute In-Person & Virtual Workshop

- **Description:**
 - When collective grief is present, whether from shared loss, community events, or ongoing uncertainty, it changes how people think, feel, communicate, and show up in their work. These impacts are often subtle, cumulative, and easy to miss, and are frequently interpreted as stress, burnout, or disengagement. In this grounding keynote, Dr. Theresa B. Skaar helps participants begin to understand how collective grief shows up, often in ways that are overlooked, and how it influences individuals, teams, and professional relationships. Drawing on her background in social psychology and her evidence-informed work in mindfulness, communication, and emotional awareness, Dr. Skaar offers practical tools that can be used in real time. Participants will learn how to recognize early signs of overwhelm and disconnection, understand when grief may be present beneath the surface, and respond without rushing to fix or minimize what's being experienced. This session blends research, reflection, and simple, applicable practices, leaving participants better equipped to stay present, communicate effectively, and navigate shared loss in their professional roles.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Explain how collective grief impacts thoughts, emotions, communication, and behavior in professional and community settings.
 - Recognize signs of overwhelm and disconnection, and understand how grief can show up in ways that are often mistaken for stress or burnout.
 - Apply practical mindfulness-based strategies to stay present, regulate responses, and communicate more effectively when supporting individuals experiencing grief.

***Presenters are subject to change as the schedule is in development.*



Heidi Smith

LPCC, FT, Certified Grief Specialist

Abounding Hope Christian Counseling, LLC

Heidi Smith is an LPCC whose specialty is grief, not only due to death, but divorce, disability, addiction and trauma. She is a Fellow of Thanatology through the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC) and a Certified Grief Specialist through the University of Wisconsin - Madison. Heidi is passionate to share grief education with other professionals and clergy. She is a wife, mother and grandmother who lives in Pine Island with her husband Dirk and their Bernese Mountain Dog Nash. For self-care she loves to water-ski, walk, listen to music and visit her family.

"Grief Unmasked: Offering Support to Schools and Communities"

60-minute In-Person & Virtual Workshop

- **Description:**
 - This presentation would begin with a 20 minute documentary highlighting grief groups in middle and high schools over the course of 10 weeks. While in group, the students worked on their masks of grief adding a different element each week. Students were then interviewed and shared the meaning of their mask.

The presentation would then discuss different aspects of group dynamics focused on diversity and how students collectively overcame their differences to listen, understand and support each other. The presentation would conclude with suggestions for starting a grief support group in either schools or community settings. it would explore potential challenges and suggestions.

- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Participants will be able to identify how the grief journey is a paradox of being both unique and universal.
 - Participants will be able to demonstrate at least two interventions to use in school or community grief groups.
 - Participants will better understand how bio-psycho-social-spiritual grief reactions impact students.



Jacqueline Werket

BA, MS, Retired Nurse Practitioner

Certified Grief Recovering Method Specialist

Retired Board-Certified Nurse Practitioner with over three decades worth of experience. Certified Grief Recovery Method Specialist. Co-author of the bestselling Book on Love and best selling author of A Grief Postponed: A Nurse Practitioner's Journey through Delayed Grief.

"Media Triggers and Delayed Grief: When Publicly Witnessed Deaths Trigger Prior Losses"

60-minute In-Person & Virtual Workshop

- **Description:**
 - Images and coverage of the deaths of Alex Pretti and Renee Good during the ICE occupation in Minneapolis were extensively covered in the media; in many instances, the TV viewer could witness these deaths. For people living with delayed grief, this kind of repeated, graphic exposure can act as a powerful trigger—reactivating a prior loss that was suppressed, postponed, or never fully processed. Some individuals may feel confused at the first signs of delayed grief: their intense reaction, hypervigilance, and need to stay hyper focused on the media. Yet, these reactions can be rooted in delayed grief related to their own previous loss—especially when that earlier death was sudden, violent, or otherwise traumatic. These widely broadcast deaths are stark examples of how media exposure can trigger delayed grief responses. Similarly, the death of the little girl from the shooting at Annunciation School could have triggered bereaved parents and caregivers, intensifying intrusive images, somatic distress, avoidance, and fear-based vigilance. This presentation clarifies delayed grief as a form of complicated grief characterized by a delayed onset of symptoms. It outlines risk factors and common trigger pathways and equips clinicians with practical assessment questions, and interventions to support patients whose grief resurfaces months or years after a loss.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Define delayed grief and differentiate it from acute grief and other forms of complicated/prolonged grief based on timing of onset and symptom pattern.
 - Identify risk factors for delayed grief, including sudden/traumatic death, limited social support, multiple concurrent stressors, and initial emotional numbing.
 - Describe how trigger events—especially repeated media exposure to traumatic deaths—cause delayed grief to surface months or years after a loss.
 - Recognize clinical signs of delayed grief (e.g., intrusive images, hypervigilance, somatic symptoms, avoidance, emotional outbursts, social withdrawal) and assess functional impairment and safety risks.
 - Implement therapeutic communication and coping strategies and identify appropriate referral pathways (e.g., grief specialist, social work, chaplaincy, support groups).

***Presenters are subject to change as the schedule is in development.*



Kristina Wright-Peterson

RN, MSN, Executive Director

Minnesota Network of Hospice & Palliative Care

Kristina Wright-Peterson, RN, MSN, is a nurse, nonprofit leader, facilitator, and educator with experience supporting individuals and communities navigating loss. Her work centers on creating spaces where grief can be named, explored, and integrated—both in clinical settings and in community contexts. Kristina has led conversations on grief, trauma, and meaning-making in healthcare, faith-based, and nonprofit environments, with a particular focus on how collective loss shapes professional practice. Drawing from her background in leadership and community engagement, she is especially interested in the intersection of personal loss histories and the roles helpers inhabit during times of shared crisis. Through teaching, facilitation, and strategic leadership, Kristina equips professionals to respond to grief with clarity, compassion, and sustainability. Her approach integrates trauma-informed principles, reflective practice, and practical tools that support both individual resilience and organizational health in an era of ongoing collective trauma.

“The Grief Beneath the Grief: How Personal Loss Histories Are Activated in Times of Collective Trauma” *60-minute In-Person Workshop*

- **Description:**
 - Collective grief does not land on a blank slate. In moments of shared trauma—mass violence, community tragedy, global conflict, political division, and the lingering effects of the pandemic—professionals are not merely witnesses. We are participants. Our own attachment histories, formative losses, and unresolved grief are often quietly activated as we support others through death-related loss. This presentation explores how collective trauma reawakens personal grief histories and shapes the way clinicians, hospice professionals, clergy, and community leaders show up in their work. Early loss experiences and previously integrated—or unintegrated—grief influence our emotional regulation, boundaries, countertransference, and caregiving patterns. In times of collective crisis, these patterns can intensify, leading to over-functioning, emotional numbing, boundary erosion, compassion fatigue, or moral distress. Without awareness, helpers may misinterpret activation as burnout or professional inadequacy. Participants will examine how “grief echoes” emerge in clinical and professional settings and how collective loss can amplify private grief narratives. Through a trauma-informed lens, this session will provide practical tools for recognizing personal activation, strengthening reflective practice, and fostering sustainable presence in grief work. Rather than framing personal grief as a liability, this presentation invites professionals to understand it as a source of empathy, depth, and attunement—when acknowledged and integrated. Participants will leave with concrete strategies for self-assessment, supervision conversations, team debriefing, and regulation practices that support both individual resilience and organizational health. In an era of shared trauma, sustainable grief care requires tending not only to those we serve, but also to the grief we carry.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Identify how collective trauma can activate personal loss histories and attachment patterns in clinical and professional settings.
 - Describe common manifestations of grief activation in helpers, including over-functioning, emotional numbing, boundary challenges, and countertransference.
 - Differentiate between burnout, compassion fatigue, and grief activation within the context of collective trauma.
 - Apply at least three trauma-informed reflective practices to increase self-awareness and emotional regulation during periods of shared loss.
 - Integrate strategies for individual and organizational support that promote sustainable, attuned grief care in times of collective crisis.

***Presenters are subject to change as the schedule is in development.*