

# **CIRCLE OF CARE: *A YEAR IN REVIEW***

*Prepared by the Southern Illinois Resource and Advocacy Center*



The Illinois  
**Family Resource Center**

Sometimes change happens an hour at a time

Funding for this program is provided in whole or in part through the Substance Use Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Block Grant through the American Rescue Plan Act.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This comprehensive evaluation documents the significant success of the Circle of Care and Handle with Care initiatives across Illinois during the 2024-2025 program year. The programs have effectively engaged over 500,000 individuals through outreach efforts, trained hundreds of professionals, and established sustainable systems to support children affected by grief, substance use disorder, and trauma.

## Key Findings:

- **Outreach Excellence:** The program achieved comprehensive statewide coverage across all five IDHS regions with more than 250 individual outreach activities
- **Training Effectiveness:** 94% of participants reported increased confidence in applying strategies to support grieving children
- **Professional Engagement:** The program successfully attracted a diverse range of professionals across multiple sectors, with strong representation from social services (47%), mental health providers (45%), and educators (31%)
- **Perception of Value:** 84% of Handle with Care participants believed the program would benefit their communities, and 63% planned to implement it
- **Implementation Interest:** Strong interest in program resources, with 75% of Handle with Care participants interested in Comfort Bags for Kids

# HANDLE WITH CARE

This report summarizes feedback from 51 respondents who participated in the Handle with Care Discussion evaluation during February-April 2025. The responses were collected across multiple Illinois counties and represent professionals from diverse roles in education, law enforcement, social services, healthcare, and community support.

## PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Participants came from at least 24 Illinois counties including: Bond, Bureau, Champaign, Christian, Clinton, Cook, Douglas, DuPage, Effingham, Fayette, Gallatin, Henry, Iroquois, Jefferson, Kane, Kendall, Lake, Macoupin, Madison, Marion, McLean, Monroe, Montgomery, Peoria, Perry, Piatt, Randolph, Rock Island, St. Clair, Washington, Wayne, White, and Will counties.

## Handle with Care Discussion



Learn how to support children impacted by trauma. The “Handle with Care” initiative helps create a safer, more understanding environment for children when they show up to school the next morning.



**SIU MEDICINE**  
CENTER FOR RURAL HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICE DEVELOPMENT



**February 19, 2025**  
12:00–1:00 PM  
[click to register!](#)



**April 1, 2025**  
12:00–1:00 PM  
[click to register!](#)



**March 11, 2025**  
5:00–6:00 PM  
[click to register!](#)



**May 8, 2025**  
5:00–6:00 PM  
[click to register!](#)

Everyone in a community is encouraged to attend, learn more, and share the vital information with the educators and law enforcement in their area!

Questions? Contact [terim@hourhouserecovery.org](mailto:terim@hourhouserecovery.org)

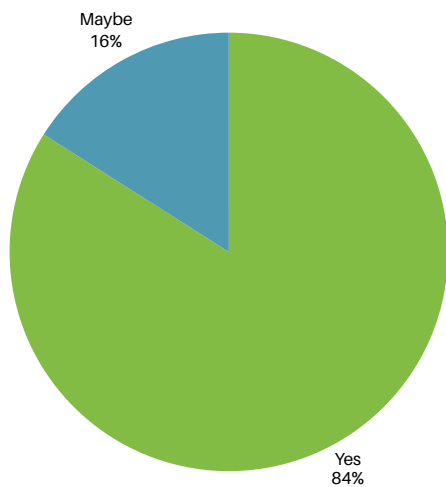
FUNDING FOR THIS PROGRAM IS PROVIDED IN WHOLE OR IN PART THROUGH THE SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION, TREATMENT, AND RECOVERY BLOCK GRANT THROUGH THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT.

## SECTOR REPRESENTATION

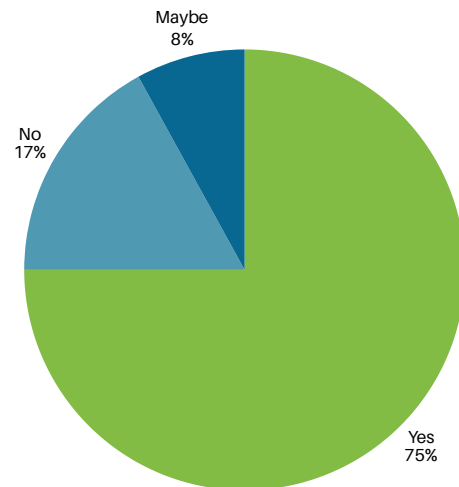
- Education: School counselors, psychologists, social workers, administrators, teachers
- Social Services: DCFS workers, case managers, recovery navigators, youth coordinators
- Mental Health: Counselors, behavioral health specialists, crisis counselors
- Law Enforcement: School resource officers, first responders, sheriff's department
- Community Support: Program coordinators, community health specialists, nonprofit directors
- Other: Home visitors, family support specialists, CASA/GAL advocates

# PROGRAM RECEPTION

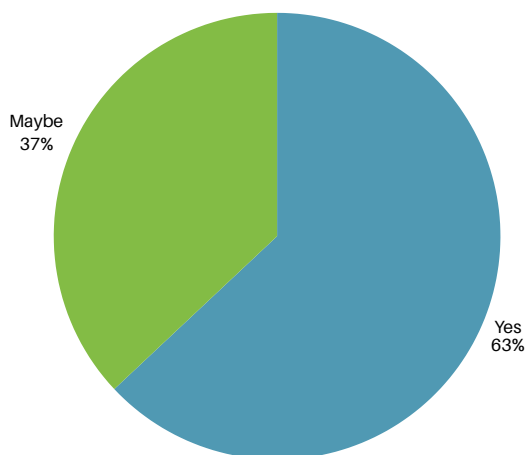
## BELIEF IN PROGRAM BENEFITS



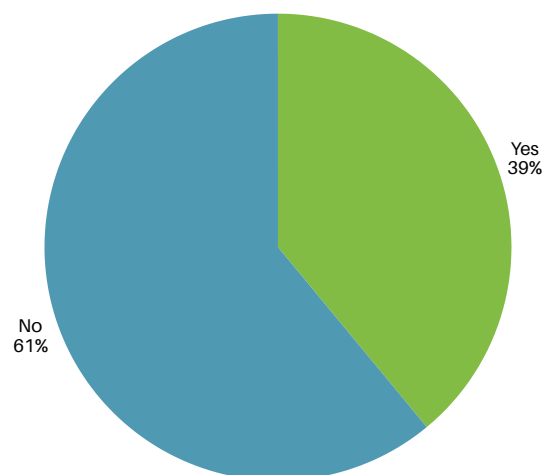
## INTERESTED IN COMFORT BAGS



## INTERESTED IN IMPLEMENTATION



## INTERESTED IN HWC CARDS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT



# QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK AND THEMES

## Presentation

- "Great information!"
- "Excellent presentation-love all of the resources."
- "Very informative and engaging"
- "Great presentation and wonderful program. Thank you for sharing"
- "Fantastic information"
- "Good discussion"
- "This was great!!!!"
- "Thank you for the great information"
- "Wonderful program and presentation"
- "The presenters were wonderful - the management of the technology was a bit distracting"
- "Appreciate your time and expertise!"
- "Very insightful, great information"

## Program Implementation

- Discussions about engaging parents and children in school communications
- Interest in formalizing the program with School Resource Officers
- Desire to bring up the program with statewide ROSC grant teams

## Follow-up Actions

- Most participants who requested comfort bags received follow-up forms on March 20 or April 8, 2025
- Several participants requested additional information about program implementation

## SUMMARY

The Handle with Care program received overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants across Illinois. The high percentage of professionals who believe the program would benefit their communities (84%) and plan to implement it (63%) suggests strong potential for program expansion. The significant interest in Comfort Bags for Kids (75%) indicates that tangible resources are valued by community professionals working with children affected by trauma.

# CIRCLE OF CARE PROGRAM OUTREACH ANALYSIS

## OVERVIEW

This report summarizes outreach efforts for the Circle of Care and Handle with Care programs conducted between September 2024 and April 2025. The data captures extensive engagement activities across Illinois, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to building awareness and implementation of these child-focused support initiatives.

VISIT THE ILLINOIS FAMILY RESOURCES WEBSITE [HERE TO VIEW!](#)



### RESOURCE TOOLKITS

The *Resource Toolkits* are virtual collections of resources designed to equip community helpers and professionals with tools to support children and teens experiencing grief related to substance use death and disorders.

#### ABOUT THE TOOLKITS

Crafted into 3 groups, based on the developmental age of a child:

Ages 0-5

Ages 6-12

Ages 13-18



The Resource Toolkits offer valuable answers to important questions, offering **hope, guidance, and confidence** to those supporting grieving children.

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## Lunch & Learn

*with the Circle of Care!*

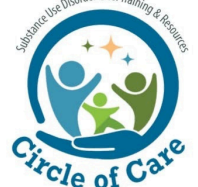
**The Circle of Care is a program dedicated to providing support for children, youth, and families grieving loss due to substance related death and disorders.**

Interested in learning more about the Circle of Care?  
Attend our virtual Lunch and Learn session listed below!

February 10, 2025  
12:00-1:00 PM CST



Scan the QR code to  
register!



FUNDING FOR THIS PROGRAM IS PROVIDED IN WHOLE OR IN PART THROUGH THE SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION, TREATMENT, AND RECOVERY BLOCK GRANT THROUGH THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT.



## Did You Know?



About **4 in 10** children who enter out-of-home care have parental substance use identified as a concern (Urban Institute, 2023).

To learn more about the Circle of Care, visit [illinoisfamilyresources.org](https://illinoisfamilyresources.org).

Funding for this program is provided in whole or in part through the Substance Use Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Block Grant through the American Rescue Plan Act.



# OUTREACH METHODS

- **One-on-One Contacts:** Approximately 150+ individual meetings with stakeholders (60% of events)
- **Community/Coalition Meetings:** 40+ presentations at existing community gatherings (16% of events)
- **Conferences:** 15+ conference presentations reaching thousands of professionals (6% of events)
- **Media & Digital Outreach:** Over 40 media campaigns including:
  - **Email blasts** (reaching 1,000-1,400+ recipients per campaign)
  - **Social media campaigns** (reaching tens of thousands)
  - **Television/streaming media** (reaching 10,000-30,000+ viewers per campaign)
  - **Radio/podcast appearances** (reaching hundreds to thousands)
- **Training Sessions:** Multiple Handle with Care specific training events

## SCALE AND REACH

575,912

PEOPLE ENGAGED  
THROUGH OUTREACH

250+

OUTREACH  
ACTIVITIES

50

CAREGIVERS  
ENGAGED

350

YOUTH ENGAGED

# REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

## Geographic Coverage

- The program achieved comprehensive statewide coverage across all five IDHS regions:
- Region 1 (Chicago Area): Extensive engagement in Cook County and surrounding areas
- Region 2 (Northwestern Illinois): Strong presence in counties including Kane, Will, DuPage, and McHenry
- Region 3 (North Central Illinois): Active in Peoria, Champaign, and surrounding counties
- Region 4 (Central Illinois): Significant presence in Coles, Edgar, and Sangamon counties
- Region 5 (Southern Illinois): Widespread engagement across Franklin, Jefferson, and other southern counties



# REGIONAL THEMES

## Region 1 (Chicago Area)

- Strong engagement with Cook County agencies
- Significant media campaign reach (70,000+ social media impressions)
- Partnerships with urban school districts and community organizations

## Region 2 (Northwestern Illinois)

- Active engagement with county health departments
- Successful media outreach (37,000+ social media impressions)
- Several Handle with Care pilot programs initiated

## Region 3 (North Central Illinois)

- Strong relationships with treatment providers
- High engagement with youth-serving organizations
- Effective media campaign (58,000+ social media impressions)

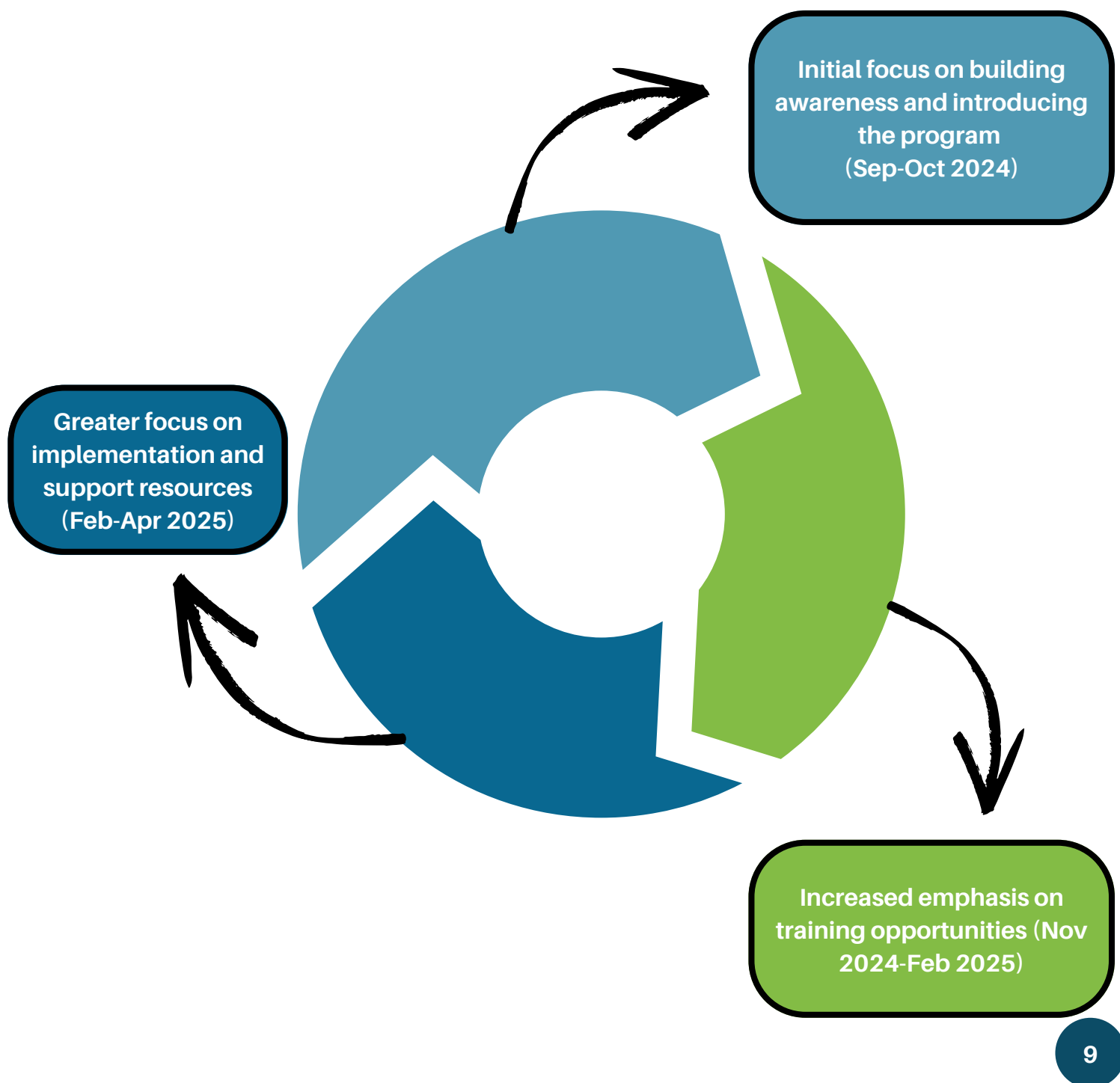
## Region 4 (Central Illinois)

- Significant one-on-one engagement with stakeholders
- Strong ROE and educational system partnerships
- Active ROSC council engagement

## Region 5 (Southern Illinois)

- Widespread community meeting participation
- Strong relationships with county-level agencies
- Effective engagement with rural communities

# EVOLUTION OF OUTREACH



# KEY OBSERVATIONS

**Multi-Pronged Approach:** The program effectively utilized diverse outreach strategies, from personal meetings to mass media, creating both depth and breadth of engagement.

**Cross-Sector Collaboration:** Outreach successfully bridged different sectors, particularly education, healthcare, and social services, creating a comprehensive support network.

**Geographic Equity:** Efforts appear well-distributed across all regions of Illinois, with attention to both urban and rural communities.

**Progressive Implementation:** The data shows a logical progression from awareness-building to training to implementation support.

**Systems-Level Engagement:** Successful connections with existing networks and coalitions (ROSCs, ROEs, etc.) likely enhanced the program's reach and sustainability potential.

# RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON OUTREACH PATTERNS

1

**Focus on Implementation Support:** With strong awareness now established, shift more resources toward supporting actual implementation of Handle with Care protocols.

2

**Enhance Youth and Caregiver Direct Engagement:** While professional outreach is strong, increasing direct engagement with youth and caregivers could strengthen program impact.

3

**Measure Implementation Outcomes:** Begin tracking not just outreach activities but actual implementation milestones and impacts across counties.

4

**Sustain Media Presence:** Continue strategic media campaigns that have demonstrated significant reach.

5

**Build Regional Champions:** Identify and support highly engaged partners in each region to serve as local implementation leaders.

# THREADS OF HOPE TRAINING EVALUATION

ANALYSIS OF PRE-TRAINING POLL RESULTS PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

## Interest in Training by Participant Type

Participant Type	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5	Average
Professionals	85%	82%	81%	83%	83%
Natural Helpers	24%	25%	31%	20%	25%
Parents/Caregivers/Family	10%	11%	11%	12%	11%

*Note: Percentages may exceed 100% as participants could select multiple roles.*

## KEY OBSERVATIONS ON PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS:

- 1. Professional Dominance:** Across all regions, professionals working with grieving children and teens represent the vast majority of participants (81-85%).
- 2. Natural Helper Participation:** Approximately one-quarter of participants identify as "natural helpers" (individuals who interact with children in personal or professional capacities like educators, youth leaders, etc.), with Region 4 showing slightly higher participation (31%) from this group.
- 3. Limited Family Participation:** Parents, caregivers, and family members of grieving children consistently represent the smallest group of participants (10-12%) across all regions.
- 4. Consistent Patterns:** The distribution of participant types is remarkably consistent across all regions, suggesting similar outreach effectiveness or similar professional-to-community ratios throughout Illinois.

# OUTREACH EFFECTIVENESS

## *How Participants Heard About the Training*

Information Source	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5	Average
Email from Circle of Care	61%	61%	59%	48%	57%
Outreach from team member	15%	18%	25%	21%	20%
Social media	13%	5%	17%	10%	11%
Television/Streaming	0%	0%	3%	1%	1%
Not sure	17%	20%	11%	20%	17%

## KEY OBSERVATIONS ON OUTREACH EFFECTIVENESS:

1. **Email Dominance:** Email communication from Circle of Care is by far the most effective outreach method across all regions (48-61%), though Region 5 shows somewhat lower effectiveness.
2. **Personal Outreach Impact:** Direct outreach from Circle of Care team members is the second most effective method (15-25%), with Region 4 showing the highest success through this approach.
3. **Social Media Variability:** Social media effectiveness varies significantly across regions (5-17%), with the lowest impact in Region 3 and highest in Region 4.
4. **Traditional Media Gap:** Television and streaming platforms show minimal impact (0-3%) across all regions, suggesting these are not effective channels for this specific audience.
5. **Awareness Gap:** A notable percentage of participants (11-20%) were unsure how they heard about the training, which may indicate indirect referrals or word-of-mouth that isn't being tracked.



# THREADS OF HOPE TRAINING POST-TRAINING EVALUATION

This report summarizes feedback from 325 participants who completed the **Threads of Hope** training between January and April 2025. The training was designed to enhance understanding and support for children and families affected by grief, substance use disorder, and mental health challenges.

## PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

### Regional Distribution

- Region 1 (Chicago Area): 36 participants (19%)
- Region 2 (Northwestern Illinois): 50 participants (27%)
- Region 3 (North Central Illinois): 29 participants (16%)
- Region 4 (Central Illinois): 30 participants (16%)
- Region 5 (Southern Illinois): 37 participants (20%)
- Statewide/Multiple Regions: 3 participants (2%)

### Professional Roles (multiple selections allowed)

- Mental Health/Substance Use Providers: 65 participants (35%)
- Social Services: 83 participants (45%)
- Educators: 56 participants (30%)
- Community Members/Natural Helpers: 46 participants (25%)
- Family Members/Caregivers: 32 participants (17%)
- ROSC Council/RCO Members: 22 participants (12%)
- Healthcare/First Responders: 18 participants (10%)
- Other Roles: 12 participants (6%)

# TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS

## *IMMEDIATE KNOWLEDGE AND CONFIDENCE CHANGES*

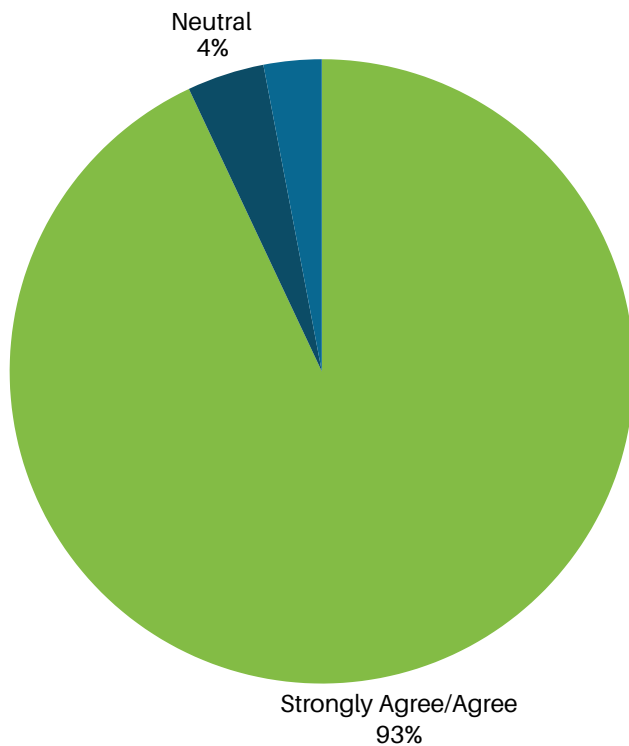
The training significantly improved participants' confidence and comfort levels across key areas, with the most dramatic gains in supporting children bereaved by substance-related deaths, where those agreeing or strongly agreeing increased from 26-44% before training to 77-91% after.

Similarly, comfort discussing substance use and grief with young people showed substantial improvement, with agreement levels rising from 42-68% to 71-93%.

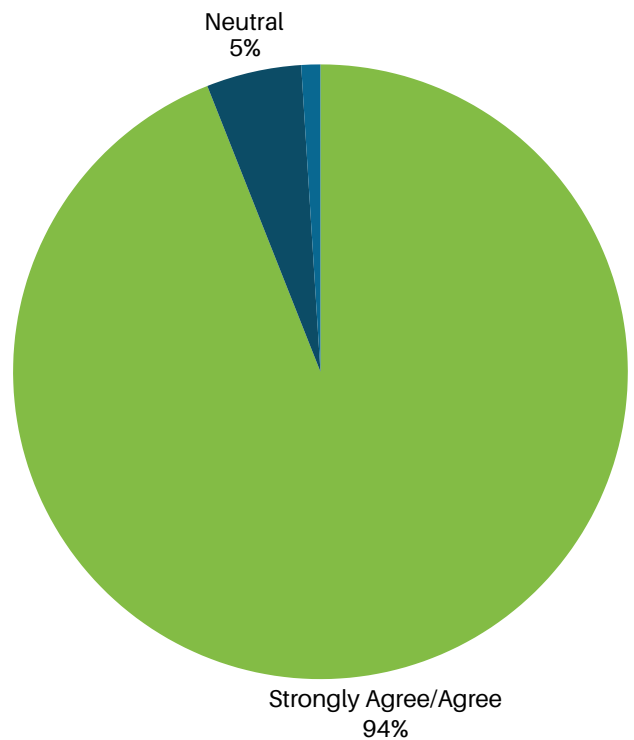
For community collaboration, two groups demonstrated notable gains (from 76-81% to 92-95% combined agree/strongly agree responses), particularly in "strongly agree" responses, which more than doubled from 23-25% to 51-52%.

However, one area without improvement was the third group's collaboration confidence, which remained virtually unchanged (79% before vs. 76% after), suggesting this specific group may require additional support or different approaches to enhance their collaborative skills.

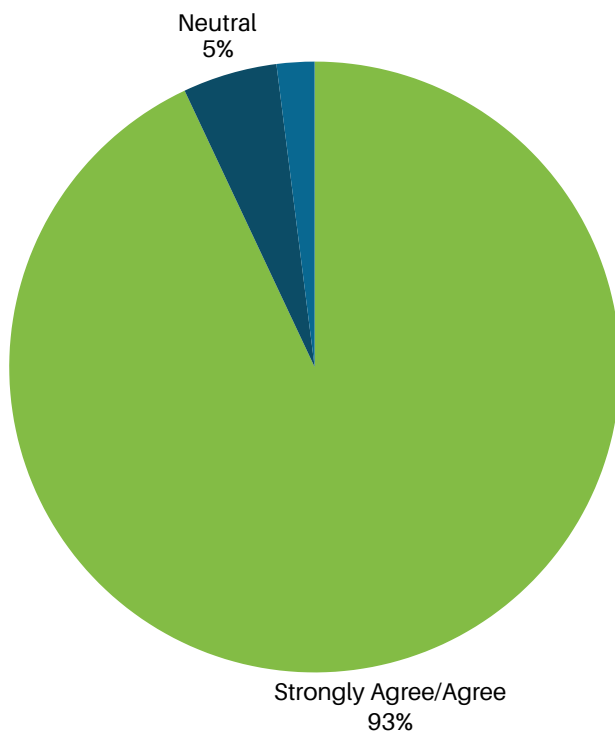
## Increased understanding of the impact of stigma



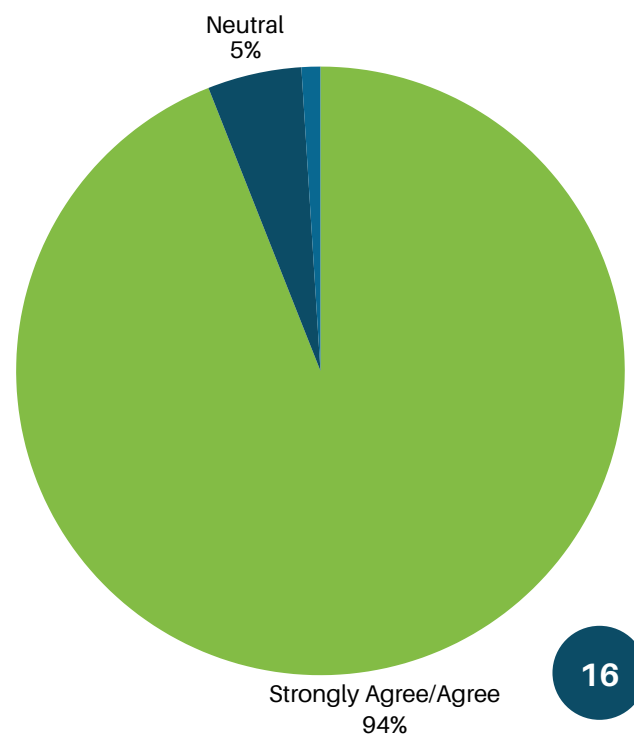
## Improved confidence in applying strategies



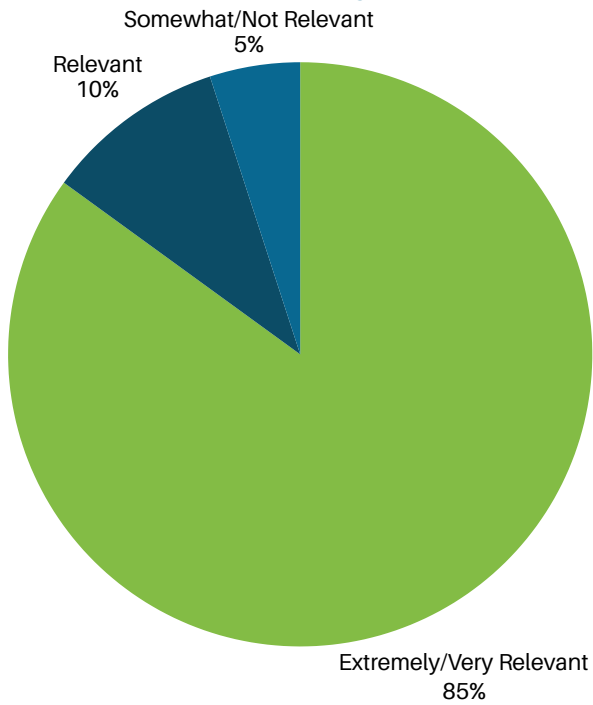
## Clarity of collaboration strategies



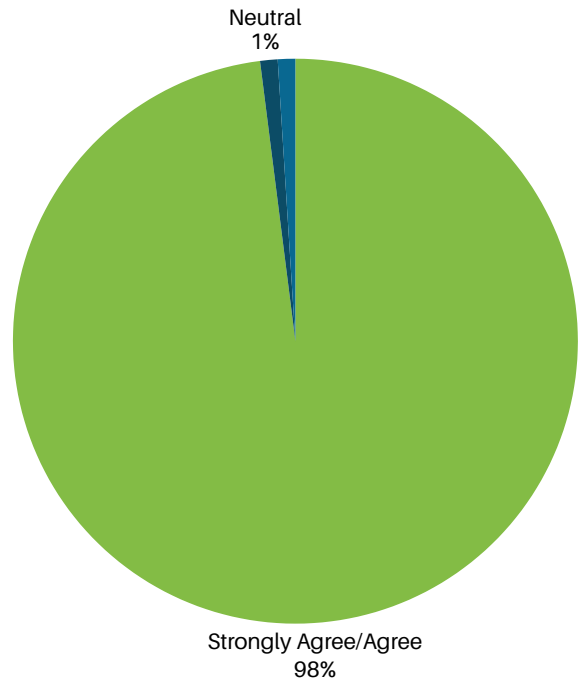
## Enhanced understanding of grief frameworks



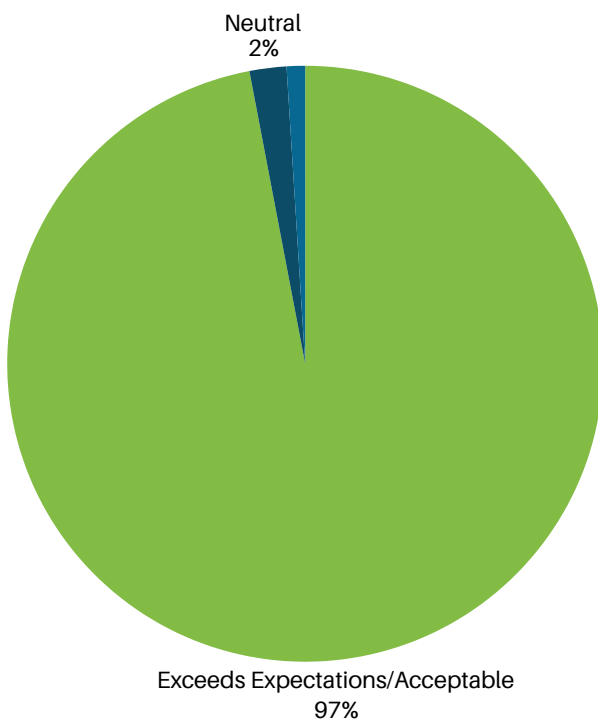
## Relevance to work or community role



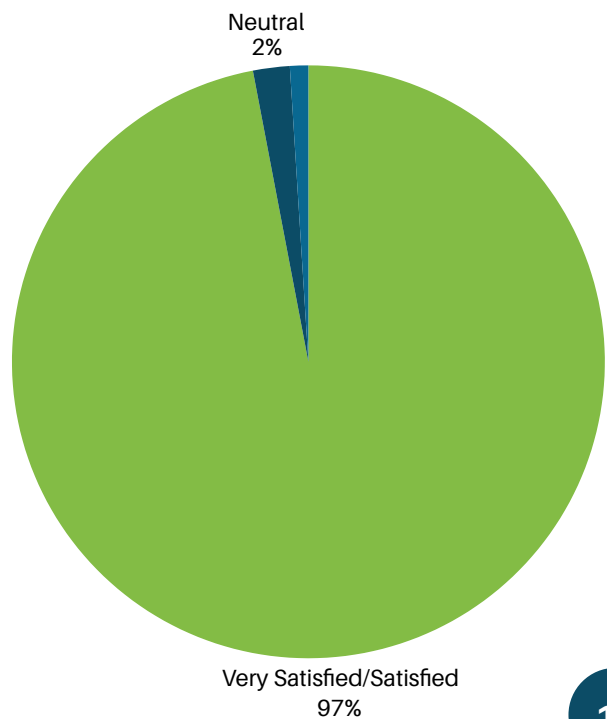
## Helpful materials and resources



## Delivery quality (pacing, engagement, clarity)



## Overall satisfaction



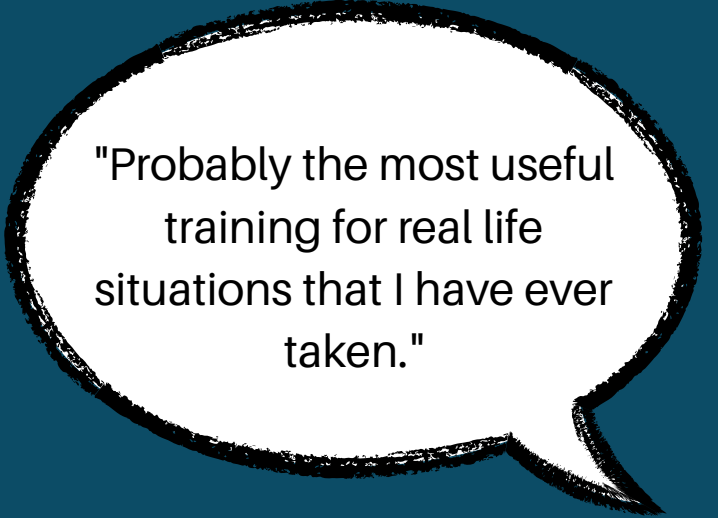
# QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK THEMES

- *Interactive Format*: Participants appreciated the breakout rooms, discussions, and engagement opportunities.
- *Presenter Quality*: Numerous comments praised the presenter (Jessica) for being knowledgeable, engaging, and passionate.
- *Practical Resources*: Attendees valued the concrete strategies, tools, and resources provided.
- *Real-Life Examples*: The use of stories, scenarios, and videos helped illustrate concepts effectively.
- *Collaborative Learning*: Networking and resource sharing among participants was highlighted as valuable.

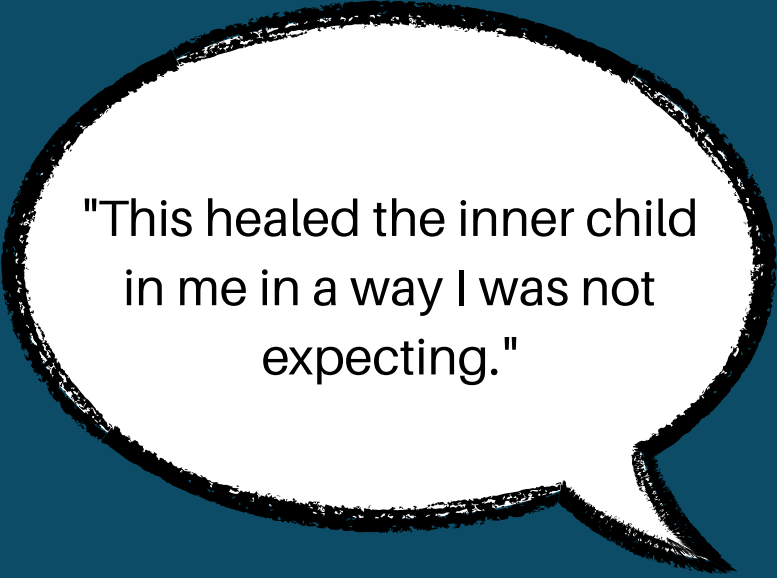
## SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- *Format Adjustments*: Some suggested more structure in breakout sessions or longer discussion time.
- *In-Person Option*: Several participants expressed a preference for in-person training when possible.
- *Specialized Tracks*: A few suggested separate tracks for professionals who already have foundational knowledge.
- *Additional Resources*: Requests for printed materials, slides, or additional follow-up resources.
- *Technical Improvements*: Minor suggestions regarding virtual platform functionality.

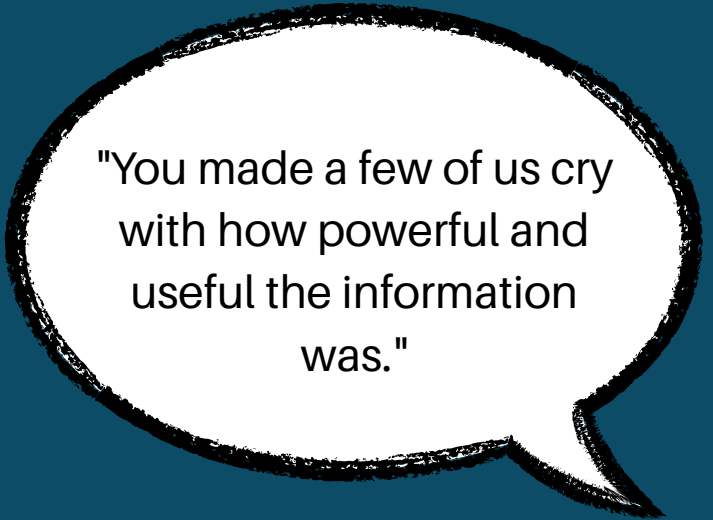
# PERSONAL IMPACT



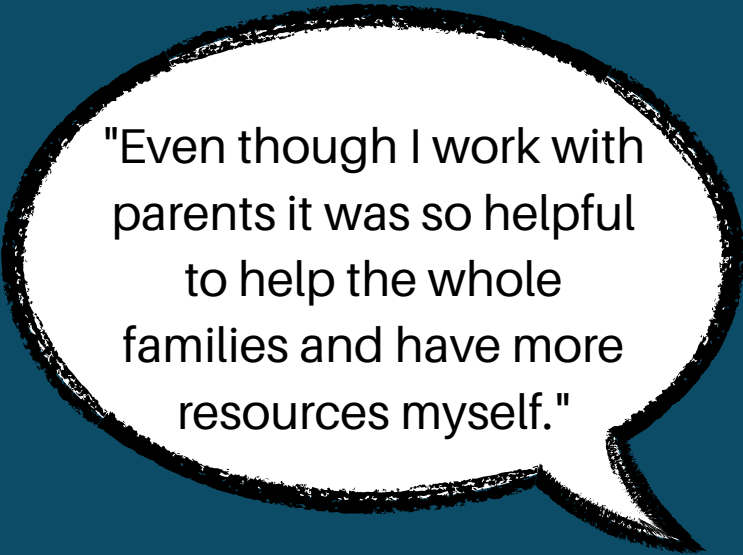
"Probably the most useful training for real life situations that I have ever taken."



"This healed the inner child in me in a way I was not expecting."



"You made a few of us cry with how powerful and useful the information was."



"Even though I work with parents it was so helpful to help the whole families and have more resources myself."

# INTEREST IN ADDITIONAL SERVICES

## Comfort Bags for Kids

- Interested in receiving: 106 participants (57%)
- Not interested: 79 participants (43%)

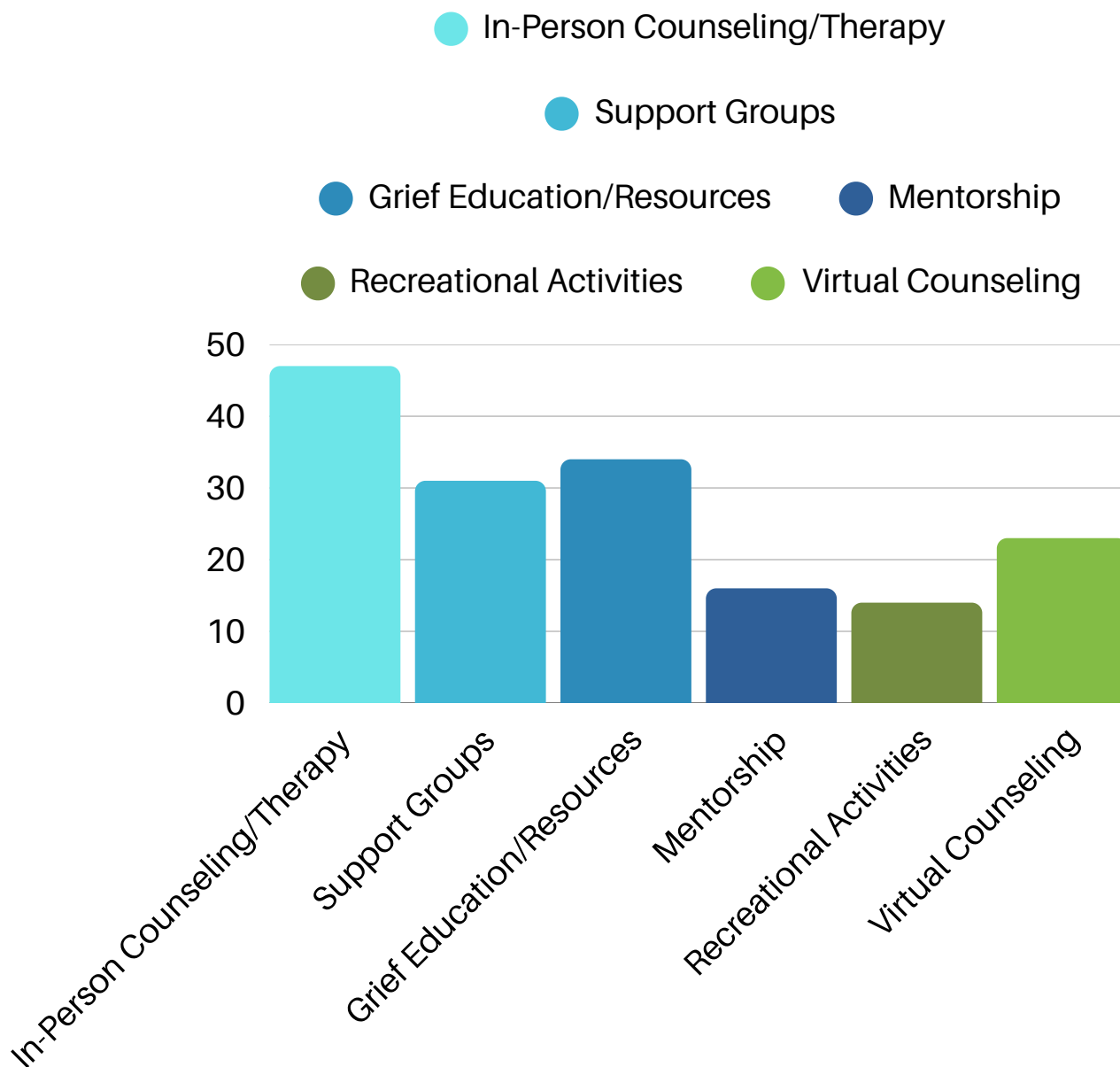
## Grief Support Services Directory

- Want to be added to directory: 61 participants (33%)
- Maybe: 69 participants (37%)
- No: 55 participants (30%)

## Handle with Care Initiative

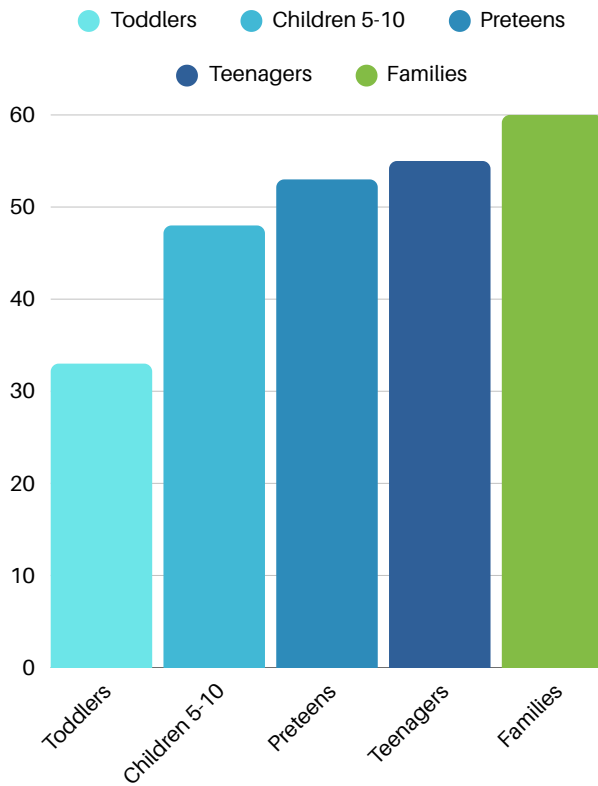
- Aware of initiative prior to training: 47 participants (25%)
- Not previously aware: 138 participants (75%)
- Interested in learning more: 117 participants (63%)
- Not interested in learning more: 68 participants (37%)

# SERVICE CAPACITY AMONG PARTICIPANTS

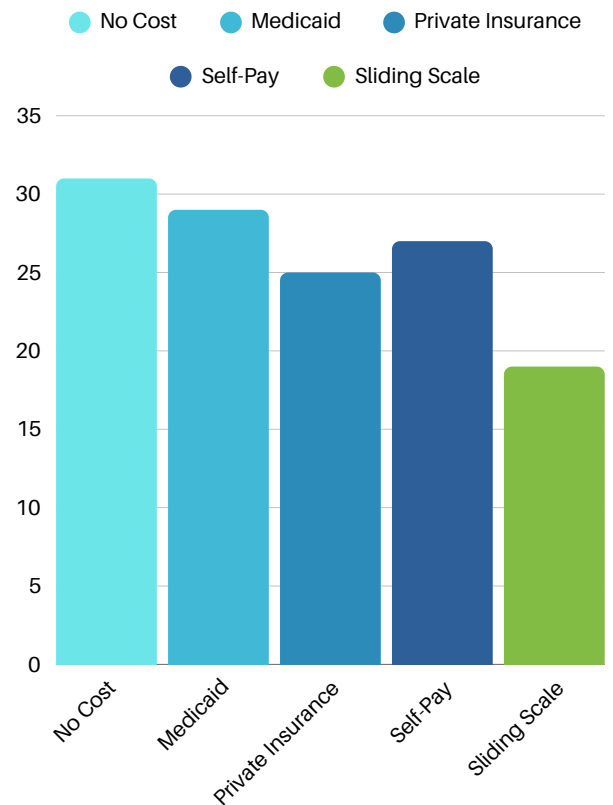




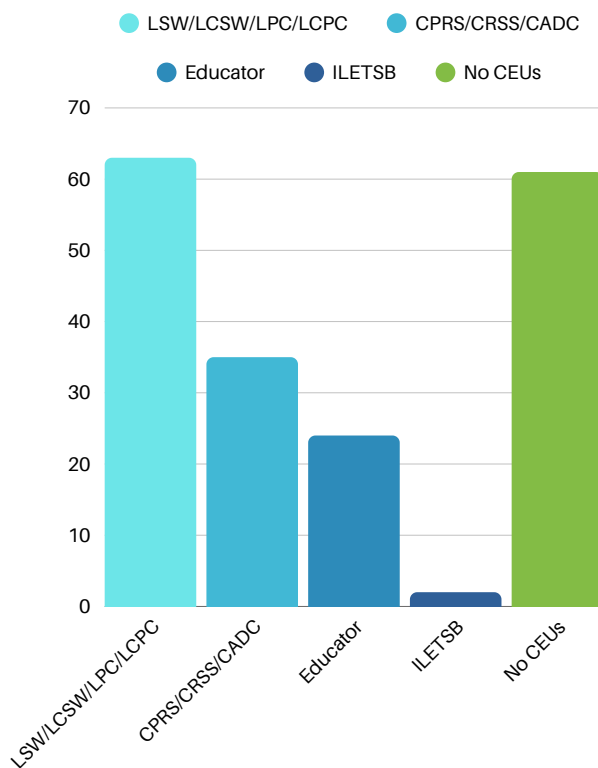
## Age Groups Served



## Payment Options



## Continuing Education Credits



# THREADS OF HOPE TRAINING CONCLUSION

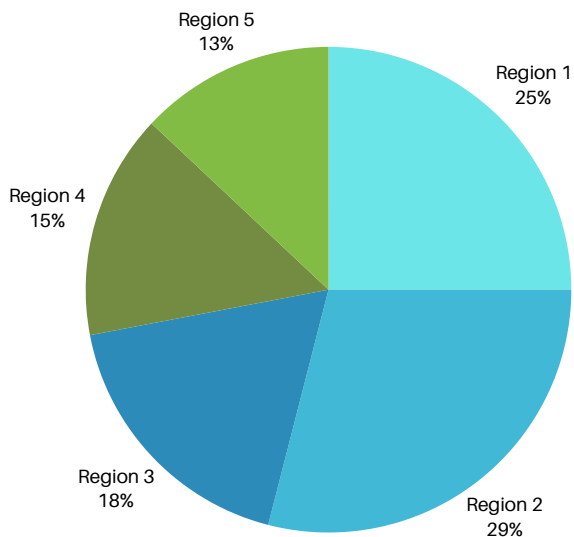
1. The Threads of Hope training was highly successful, with over 90% of participants reporting positive outcomes across all evaluation metrics.
2. The training effectively reached diverse professionals across all regions of Illinois, with particularly strong representation from social service providers, mental health professionals, and educators.
3. Participants found the training not only professionally valuable but personally meaningful, with many expressing emotional responses to the content.
4. The interactive, engaging delivery style was a key strength of the program, with the presenter receiving consistently positive feedback.
5. The training successfully increased awareness of the Handle with Care initiative, with 63% of participants expressing interest in learning more.
6. There is significant potential for expanding the grief support services network, with 70% of participants expressing at least tentative interest in being included in the directory.
7. The training helped identify numerous service providers working with children and families affected by grief, creating valuable data for resource mapping and referral networks.
8. Continuing education opportunities were an important component of the training, with 67% of participants requesting various types of professional credits.

# CIRCLE OF CARE LUNCH AND LEARN SESSIONS

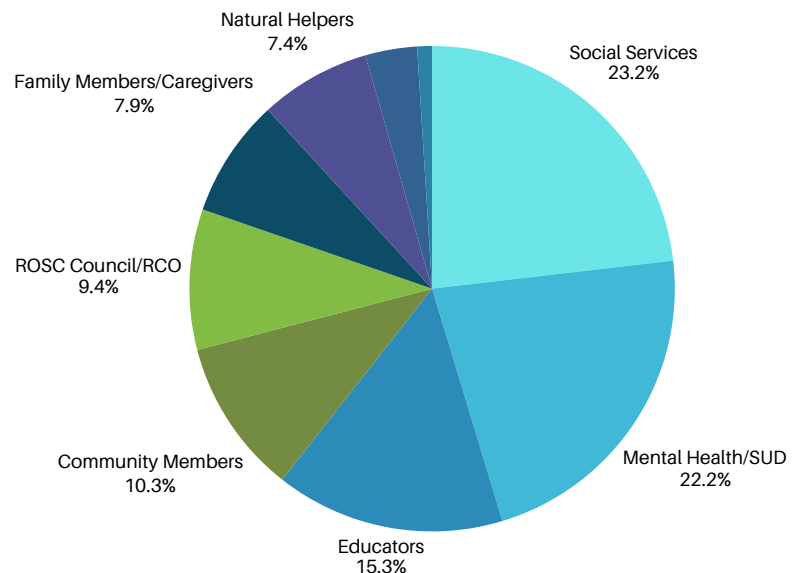
This report analyzes registration data from 163 participants who registered for the Circle of Care Lunch and Learn sessions between November 2024 and March 2025. These sessions were offered across five Illinois regions, targeting professionals and community members who work with youth affected by grief, substance use disorder, and related challenges.

## Registration Demographics

### Regional Distribution

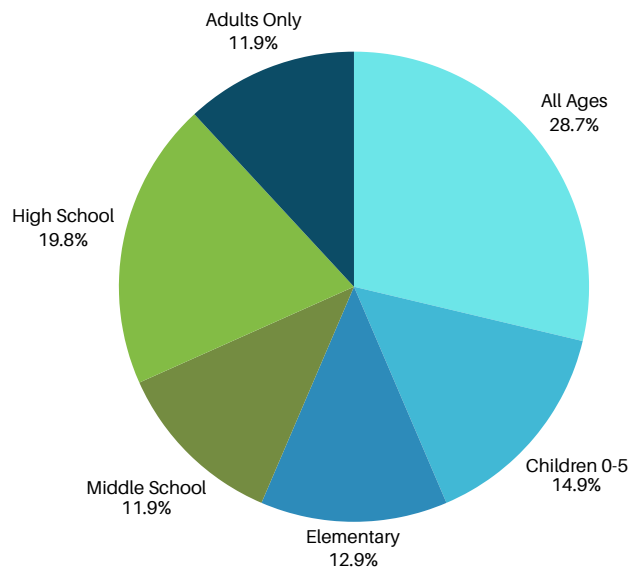


### Professional Roles



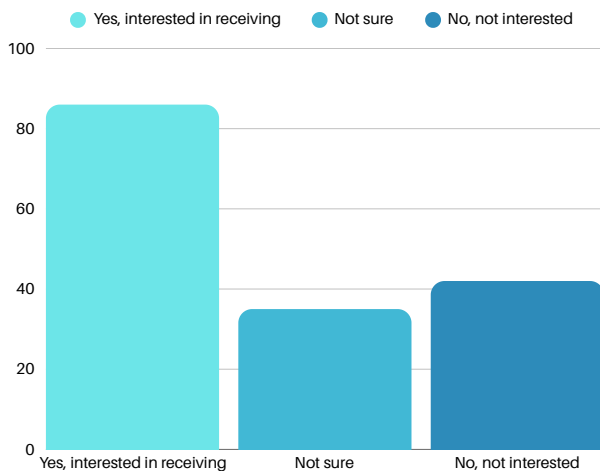
# Registration Demographics

## Ages Served

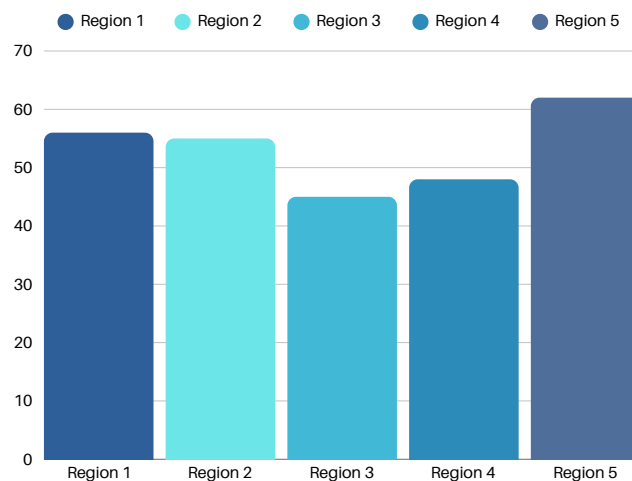


## Interest in Comfort Bags for Kids

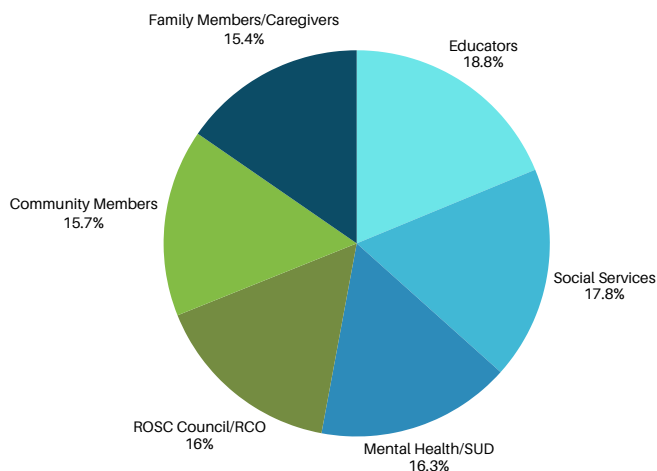
### Overall Interest



### Interest by Region

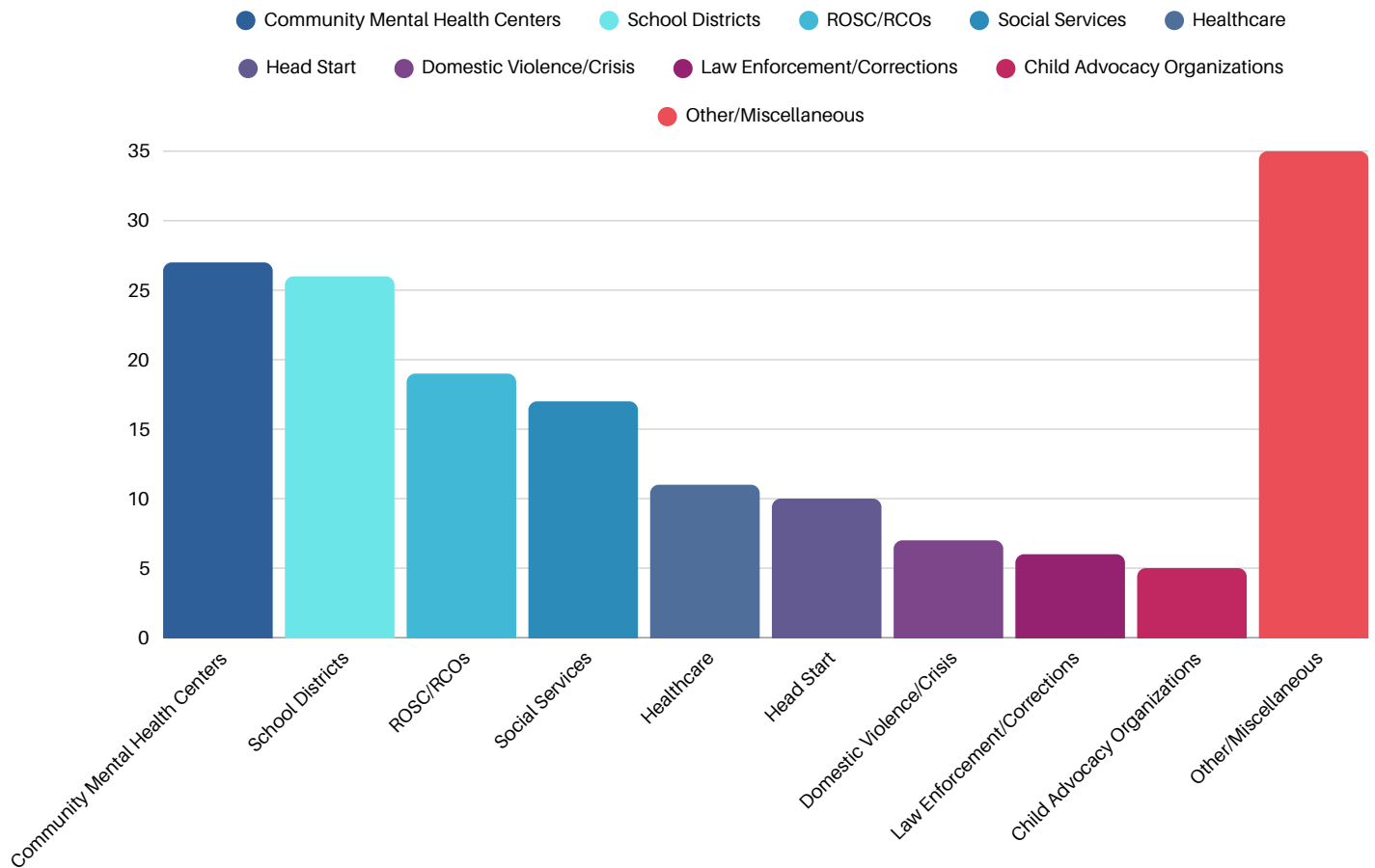


### Professional Role



# Organizational Representation

## Types of Organizations Represented



## Notable Organizations with Multiple Registrants

CEFS Head Start  
Hour House/ROSC  
ComWell  
Arrowleaf  
Chestnut Health Systems  
Sinnissippi Centers  
Centerstone  
Brightpoint  
TASC  
Egyptian Health Department

# Key Themes from Role Descriptions

## Common Roles and Responsibilities

- **Direct Service Provision:** Many registrants described providing direct services to children, families, and individuals affected by substance use, mental health issues, and trauma.
- **Case Management:** Numerous participants indicated they help connect clients to resources, navigate systems, and coordinate care across multiple domains.
- **Educational Support:** School-based professionals described supporting students' social-emotional learning, providing counseling, and helping teachers respond appropriately to trauma.
- **Prevention and Intervention:** Several registrants work in prevention programming for substance use and mental health, particularly in school settings.
- **Recovery Support:** Many participants provide peer support or recovery-oriented services for individuals with substance use disorders.
- **Community Coordination:** ROSC coordinators and coalition members described their work building networks of care and coordinating community resources.
- **Crisis Response:** Some participants work in crisis intervention, including domestic violence response, emergency services, and crisis counseling.
- **Family Support:** Many registrants work directly with families, particularly those with young children, providing parenting support, education, and resources.

### School-Aged Children:

The largest group served, with particular emphasis on middle and high school students.

**Justice-Involved Youth:**  
Several participants work specifically with youth in the juvenile justice system.

**Families in Crisis:**  
Multiple registrants work with families experiencing crisis, including domestic violence, homelessness, and child welfare involvement.

**Recovery Community:**  
Many registrants focus on individuals with substance use disorders and their families.

**Early Childhood:**  
Significant focus on children 0-5 and their families, especially through Head Start programs.

# Regional Variations

## Region 2:

- Largest number of registrants overall (29%)
- Strong representation from recovery community organizations
- Good mix of school-based and community-based providers

## Region 1:

- Higher proportion of educators and school-based professionals
- More urban community organizations represented
- Strong interest in Comfort Bags (56%)

## Region 3:

- Higher proportion of mental health providers
- Several child advocacy organizations represented
- Lowest interest in Comfort Bags (45%)

## Region 4:

- Strong representation from ROSC coordinators and recovery support professionals
- Several domestic violence and crisis organizations represented
- Moderate interest in Comfort Bags (48%)

## Region 5:

- Highest proportion of rural service providers
- Several multi-county service organizations represented
- Highest interest in Comfort Bags (62%)

# Conclusions

**Diverse Professional Reach:** The training attracted a wide range of professionals across multiple sectors, with particularly strong representation from social services, mental health providers, and educators.

**Cross-System Collaboration Potential:** The mix of participants creates strong potential for cross-system collaboration, with representatives from education, mental health, healthcare, recovery support, and child welfare all represented.

**Strong Interest in Comfort Bags:** Over half of registrants (53%) expressed interest in receiving Comfort Bags for Kids, indicating a recognized need for grief support resources.

**Statewide Engagement:** The training successfully engaged participants from all five regions of Illinois, with balanced representation that reflects both urban and rural areas.

**Organizational Partnerships:** Multiple registrants from the same organizations suggest institutional commitment to addressing grief and substance use impacts on children.

**Direct Service Focus:** Most registrants provide direct services to children and families, suggesting that training content will have immediate practical application in the field.

**Multi-Age Focus:** While many registrants work with school-aged children, there was significant representation of professionals working with early childhood (0-5) and adults, creating opportunity for a lifecycle approach to addressing grief and substance use impacts.



# Peer Listening Sessions on Children Affected by Substance Use Disorder

## Key Themes from Childhood Experiences

### Home Environment

Participants described their childhoods as "traumatic, abusive, with feelings of unimportance, being invisible, low self-worth, lack of understanding about why parents chose substances, lack of peace, confusion, not realizing that chaos was not normal, isolated, lonely, no voice."

Many participants reported "feelings of being invisible, disposable, and annoying" and spent "a significant amount of time alone because of parent's substance use." Notably, several participants mentioned they "didn't realize that things in the home were not normal until someone brought it to their attention."

Domestic violence was commonly reported alongside substance use, with one participant sharing: "I was surrounded with the chaos of physical altercations as well as moving and being uprooted from my home and friends too many times. I went to 9 different schools before I was 17."

### Emotional Impact

Children experienced "shame and guilt, shame that it was happening (especially when they had the opportunity to go to someone else's house where this wasn't the experience), guilt that they couldn't stop it; shame and fear 'because I never knew which version of my mom was coming home.'" Many reported carrying "sadness and depression" that stayed with them into adulthood.

The family environment created long-term communication challenges: "Still face challenges with voicing emotions and feelings because they were raised in fear and unable to speak up about their feelings, identify adult challenges with communication and how to appropriately voice their feelings."

# Peer Listening Sessions on Children Affected by Substance Use Disorder

## Key Themes from Childhood Experiences

### Protective Factors

Support came primarily from "siblings when no affection or support came from parents," though this wasn't always positive due to "learned behaviors from older siblings." For many, the importance of "protective factors and the presence of a caring and safe adult" was crucial. "Safe places" included "teachers, grandparents, school, church, girl scouts, choir, community groups," though one participant noted these options were limited due to "poverty, lack of transportation, etc."

Some participants had difficulty accessing support even when it existed: "There was the idea of resources, the people that were there to help you, but zero ability to step over that threshold." Family stigma created barriers: "There was the idea of resources, the people that were there to help you, but zero ability to step over that threshold."

## The Impact of Loss and Trauma

### Processing Loss

For those who lost someone to substance use, common emotions included "guilt because overdose and suicide are preventable; responsibility; fixation on the 'how' of the death as a way to rationalize and not feel the feelings of grief."

Participants described ongoing "living losses" while parents were still alive: "difficulties with trying to connect with resources while navigating the loss; themes of children feeling like they were never important enough for their parents to care (even though they were still alive)."

# Peer Listening Sessions on Children Affected by Substance Use Disorder

## The Impact of Loss and Trauma

### Community Response

When dealing with loss in the community, participants spent time "defending the person who passed (they're not selfish, not a coward, etc)" and often felt they needed to "censor your answer so that you don't impact the feelings of the person asking."

Hurtful responses included statements like "People who commit suicide don't deserve a funeral," or "that I was better off without my mother. That worse things would happen and I shouldn't worry about it."

## Reflections and Recommendations

### Messages for Children

When asked what they would tell children currently experiencing similar situations, participants emphasized: "believe in yourself, keep trying even if you fail; Just because you had a terrible childhood doesn't mean you can't have a wonderful adulthood." They wanted children to know "This has nothing to do with you, these are adults who are struggling, you're not adding to their pain, you're not causing their pain, they're not actively choosing these things over you."

Similar messages of hope appeared: "I wish someone would have let me know that life isn't just a continual dark place; God is always there, you aren't alone, and it's okay not to be okay; It's not your fault, there's nothing wrong with you, you didn't cause this."

# Peer Listening Sessions on Children Affected by Substance Use Disorder

## Reflections and Recommendations

### System Improvements

When asked what could have been done differently, participants emphasized that "the people that knew should have spoke up on behalf of the children in the home—this creates a lot of internal turmoil and wondering how life could have been different if someone would have spoken up."

Adult reflections highlighted the importance of "understanding that drug use is a physical illness" and "understanding that mental health plays a significant role in parent substance use." They also recognized the critical value of "protective factors and community programs AS WELL AS accessibility to these programs regardless of SDOH factors."

## Conclusion

These peer listening sessions reveal the profound, lasting impact of growing up in homes affected by substance use disorder. Participants' experiences highlight the need for increased awareness, reduced stigma, accessible support services, and proactive intervention on behalf of children. The voices captured in these sessions provide valuable insights for developing more effective prevention and support strategies for families affected by SUD.

# Evaluation of Illinois Grief Support Resources

## Overview of Resources

The Circle of Care Landscape Analysis of Grief Support Services for Children and Families Impacted by SUD-Related Grief and Loss identified over 400 grief support resources throughout the state of Illinois including:

**Support Groups:**  
Over 130 group-based support organizations

**Specialised Programs:**  
Camp programs, workshops, and retreats for specific populations

**Individual Practitioners:**  
Approximately 270 therapists and counselors offering grief support services

## Geographic Distribution

The resources are distributed across Illinois with concentrations in:

- Cook County: Highest concentration with **approximately 40% of total resources**
- Collar Counties (DuPage, Kane, Lake, Will, McHenry): About 25% of resources
- Central Illinois (Sangamon, Champaign, Peoria areas): Approximately 15%
- Southern Illinois: About 10%
- Western/Northwestern Illinois: Approximately 10%

There are significant service gaps in rural counties, particularly in southern and western Illinois. **Several counties appear to have no dedicated grief support resources.**

# Evaluation of Illinois Grief Support Resources

## Support Groups (Organizational Resources)

1. **General Grief Support:** Programs like AccentCare Hospice, Rainbows for All Children, and various hospital-based bereavement services
2. **Loss-Specific Groups:**
  - Child Loss: Organizations like Camp Sheilah, Missing Pieces Program, LOSS (Loving Outreach to Survivors of Suicide)
  - Spouse/Partner Loss: Specialized groups through Willow House, Barr Harris Children's Grief Center
  - Substance-Related Loss: GRASP (Grief Recovery After Substance Passing) chapters, Heroin Epidemic Relief Organization
3. **Age-Specific Programs:**
  - Children/Youth: Camp Kangaroo, Camp Courage, Rainbows groups, Camp Mariposa
  - Teens: Grief in Common: Teens Grief Support Group, Camp Courage-Teens
  - Adults: Multiple hospice-based adult grief programs
4. **School-Based Support:** Multiple Rainbows for All Children programs in schools (most not open to the public)

## Individual Practitioners

- **Types of Professionals:** Licensed therapists, counselors, social workers, psychologists
- **Specializations:** Many practitioners specialize in grief, trauma, children's grief, or complicated grief
- **Practice Settings:** Private practices, community centers, medical facilities, online services

# Evaluation of Illinois Grief Support Resources

## Language Accessibility

- Spanish: Approximately 60 organizations/practitioners offer services in Spanish
- Other Languages: Limited availability of services in:
  - Chinese/Mandarin (4+ providers)
  - American Sign Language (3 providers)
  - Arabic (3+ providers)
  - Hindi/Urdu (5+ providers)
  - Polish (3 providers)
  - Various other languages with 1-2 providers each

## Geographic Accessibility

- **Urban vs. Rural:** Significant disparity with urban areas having multiple options while many rural counties have few or no dedicated grief resources
- **Online Services:** Increasing availability of telehealth and virtual support groups, particularly since 2020.

## Financial Accessibility

- **Free Services:** Many support groups offered at no cost, particularly those through hospices, hospitals, and community organizations
- **Sliding Scale:** Several providers indicate sliding fee scales
- **Insurance:** Varied acceptance of insurance plans among private practitioners

# Evaluation of Illinois Grief Support Resources

## Population Resources: Children and Youth

- Robust programming through organizations like:
  - Rainbows for All Children (numerous school-based chapters)
  - Camp Kangaroo
  - Willow House
  - Barr Harris Children's Grief Center
  - Camp Courage
  - Tommy's Kids Camp

## Population Resources: Loss-Specific Support

- Suicide Loss: Alliance of Hope, LOSS program
- Substance-Related Loss: GRASP chapters, Heroin Epidemic Relief Organization, Live 4 Lali
- Homicide Loss: Camp Sheilah
- Military Loss: Tuesday's Children

## Trends and Gaps

### Strengths

1. **Hospice-Affiliated Resources:** Strong presence of hospice-based bereavement services statewide
2. **Children's Programming:** Relatively robust offerings for children, especially in urban areas
3. **Virtual Options:** Growing availability of online support groups and telehealth services

### Gaps

1. **Geographic Disparities:** Significant service gaps in rural counties
2. **Language Barriers:** Limited non-English options, particularly for languages other than Spanish
3. **Special Populations:** Few resources specifically designed for:
  - a. LGBTQ+ individuals experiencing grief
  - b. Culturally-specific grief support for diverse communities
  - c. People with disabilities
  - d. Men-Specific Support: Very few resources explicitly targeting men's grief experiences



# Evaluation of Illinois Grief Support Resources

## Recommendations

**Resource Navigation:**  
Creating a centralized, searchable database to help Illinois residents find appropriate grief support

**Cultural Competence:**  
Creating culturally responsive grief support programs

**Rural Outreach:** Developing mobile or virtual services to reach underserved rural communities

**Language Access:**  
Expanding multilingual capabilities, particularly in languages common to Illinois immigrant communities

**Special Populations:**  
Developing targeted resources for underserved groups

# Outcomes and Future Directions

## Program Impacts

The Circle of Care and Handle with Care initiatives have demonstrated significant positive impacts across multiple domains:

1. **Professional Competence:** Training participants showed marked improvements in their confidence and skills working with grieving children, with 91-94% reporting increased understanding and confidence after training.
2. **Resource Development:** The program has successfully distributed Comfort Bags to over 100 organizations serving children, creating immediate tangible supports for bereaved youth.
3. **Systems Change:** The Handle with Care program has begun implementation in multiple counties, with 63% of participants reporting plans to implement protocols in their communities.
4. **Cross-Sector Collaboration:** The diverse participation across sectors (education, healthcare, social services, law enforcement, mental health) demonstrates successful bridge-building between traditionally siloed systems.
5. **Statewide Engagement:** The program has achieved meaningful engagement across all five IDHS regions, with balanced representation and activities tailored to regional needs.

## Challenges and Opportunities

While the evaluation demonstrates substantial success, several challenges and opportunities remain:

- **Rural Access:** Geographic disparities in grief support resources highlight the need for targeted outreach and service development in underserved rural counties.
- **Family Engagement:** Despite strong professional participation, direct engagement with families and caregivers remains relatively low (11-17% of participants).
- **Implementation Support:** As awareness has been successfully built, additional resources may be needed to support the implementation phase of Handle with Care across diverse systems.
- **Specialized Populations:** More targeted approaches may be needed to reach specific underserved populations, including LGBTQ+ youth, culturally diverse communities, and men/boys experiencing grief.
- **Sustainability Planning:** Ensuring the long-term sustainability of these initiatives will require continued attention to building local capacity and leadership.

# Outcomes and Future Directions

## Recommendations for Program Enhancement

Based on the comprehensive evaluation findings, the following recommendations are proposed for program enhancement:

1. **Implementation Coaching:** Develop a structured implementation support system with regional coaches to help organizations move from training to practice.
2. **Family Outreach Strategy:** Create dedicated strategies to increase direct engagement with parents, caregivers, and youth, potentially through partnerships with existing family-serving organizations.
3. **Resource Navigator Development:** Build on the grief resource mapping to create user-friendly navigation tools for both professionals and families.
4. **Regional Champions:** Identify and support local champions in each region who can drive implementation and sustainability efforts.
5. **Targeted Expansion:** Develop specialized approaches for identified gaps in the support system, particularly for rural communities and culturally diverse populations.
6. **Outcome Measurement:** Transition from measuring outreach and training participation to tracking implementation milestones and direct impacts on children and families.

## Conclusion

The Circle of Care and Handle with Care programs have demonstrated remarkable success in their initial implementation phase. Through comprehensive outreach, high-quality training, and strategic resource development, these initiatives have laid a strong foundation for supporting children affected by grief, substance use disorder, and trauma across Illinois.

The programs have successfully engaged professionals across multiple sectors, built awareness of best practices, and begun to establish systems-level changes that can create lasting impacts. While challenges remain, particularly in reaching underserved communities and ensuring implementation fidelity, the groundwork has been established for continued growth and impact.

With continued support and strategic enhancements, these programs have significant potential to transform how Illinois communities respond to and support children affected by grief and trauma, ultimately helping to break intergenerational cycles of substance use and build resilience in vulnerable youth.



# The Illinois Family Resource Center

Sometimes change happens an hour at a time



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