

## **Funding Proposal - Grief Group Curriculum**

Much of CMC:Foundation for Change's work is focused on creating better outcomes for the families of those who struggle with substance use: fewer relationships destroyed, less financial stress, more support, connection, and growth – and above all, fewer deaths, and less grief. But overdose remains a stark reality for more than 100,000 families every year in the US. Not to mention, overdose rates have continued to rise as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased presence of fentanyl in drug supplies.

We are doing all we can to lower those rates by supporting families in the throes of their loved one's substance use disorder, but there are countless families who have already lost their loved one and who also need support that addresses the specific hardships associated with substance-related deaths. Namely, families experience powerful guilt and regret, which is only made worse by outdated and punitive messaging about substance use that emphasizes "codependency," "enabling," and other concepts that only serve to shame them. Meanwhile, families who lose a loved one to substance use often have additional wounds from years of stress and trauma related to their loved one's ongoing struggles. They often feel isolated in grief groups with families who have lost children in other ways like accidents or illness, due to these unique experiences (and the stigma) associated with their own loss.

The feedback that we receive from families who have lost a loved one and community members who work with these grieving families is consistent: there are not enough support structures in place to manage the overwhelming need.

### **Goals of Project:**

- Design a peer-led group curriculum for parents and families who have lost a loved one to substance use. The curriculum will focus on meaning-building and community connection after loss, while remaining grounded in compassionate, evidence-based approaches for navigating grief. Special care will be taken to focus on the unique experience of losing a child to substance use.
- Launch a national network of *Invitation to Change*-based grief groups for parents and families, accessible through the CMC:FFC website.
- Develop and maintain a virtual community space for group leaders. The space will offer support and ongoing learning, and will include monthly check-in meetings, online discussions, and shared materials and resources.
- Create a focus/advisory group of community members who have lost a family member to substance use and who are committed to helping CMC:FFC develop this set of community resources. FFC will consult with this group throughout the development and rollout of the group curriculum, as well as the community space for group leaders.

- Expand the capacity of CMC:FFC's data program in order to collect pilot data on these new ITC grief groups. This expansion will include the development of new surveys, expansion of our data-collection infrastructure, and ongoing one-on-one work with community members and group leaders.
- Use the experience, data, and materials that emerge from this pilot program to help others in the addiction space meet the needs of grieving families

### **Current Status of Project:**

CMC:FFC has conducted an initial survey of the grief resources that are already out there, through literature review as well as direct community outreach. Meanwhile, we plan to replicate and lean on the existing scaffolding of our ITC Community Groups/Level 1 ITC Certification Program to launch this new project. We have a large cohort of passionate and dedicated professionals who are trained in the ITC as well as in running groups, and many of these folks come from a personal history of substance use and loss in the family. We will ask these ITC community members to participate in a focus group, drawing from both their professional and personal experience to audit our materials and curriculum, offer insights into families' needs, and provide ongoing feedback as we develop and launch our program.

### **2023 Goals and Associated Funding Needs: \$60,500**

- **\$25,000 Curriculum Development:** Using the current *Invitation to Change* Group Curriculum as an anchoring point, we will bring in the expertise of additional clinicians and researchers, trained in protocols such as Complicated Grief, to develop a 10-15 Session Grief Support and Skills Group Curriculum. We will additionally develop a new workshop program to train Level 1-certified community members in this new curriculum.
- **\$5,000 Data Program:** A core part of CMC:FFC's mission is to develop materials and resources that are tested for efficacy. Our Director of Training will develop a set of measures to assess the utility and acceptability of our new curriculum.
- **\$25,000 Pilot Launch:** To launch our pilot, CMC:FFC will train a small group of experienced ITC Level I members in the new curriculum, providing support and feedback as they launch their first round of ITC Grief Groups. We will actively refine and redevelop our materials as needed based on feedback from this initial pilot cohort, as well as feedback from our community focus group members.
- **\$5,500 Administrative Overhead:** 10% of total cost of project