

### **Men's Grief**

We also offered for the first time in many years a men-only group for bereaved fathers. In recognition of the fact that we all grieve uniquely and that many things, including gender, impact on the grief process, we wanted to create a space for men to explore their grief with their peers. A successful group, we hope to continue to offer these and other unique groups in the future.

### **New Children's Program Manual**

Authored by Agnes Struik, BFO-Toronto's Children's Consultant, *Peering Through the Hole in my Heart* is a comprehensive and user-friendly manual full of activities, resources and materials that BFO-Toronto volunteers can utilize in the development and delivery of a nine-week mutual support group for bereaved children. Future plans include a second draft of the manual and possible copywriting.

### **Mindfulness Meditation**

A one-time workshop was offered to bereaved adults to explore mindfulness as a coping strategy in learning to live with their grief. We are exploring the possibility of offering ongoing courses.

### **Adult Grief Support**

Discussions began in late 2004 regarding expanding our mutual support programs to include bereaved spouses/partners as well as adults over 30 years of age who have lost a parent or sibling. This builds on our current programming to young adults (18-30) who have experienced the death of a parent or sibling, as well as young widows and widowers whose children participate in our programs for bereaved kids.

### **Parental Bereavement Research Project**

BFO-Toronto is supporting the good work of York University and the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands by making bereaved parents aware of the opportunity to participate in this important longitudinal study of the impact of parental bereavement and by training and supporting the visiting students from the Netherlands.

**Feedback from our program participants included:** *"It felt good to know that grieving was a human, as well as shared experience."*

*"I realized that there are so many facets to grief and we all experience it in a unique way." "The group gave me a safe place to talk – helped me share my sorrow and gave me encouragement. I am not alone and I will survive this." "The group helped me learn how to relate to my family and friends again." "I was able to connect with others who have shared a similar experience – something I don't have in my peer group." "I learned that my feelings were normal and that healing takes time...but it will come." "Helped me to feel not so alone in my pain."*

### **Education and Outreach**

Volunteers and staff also contributed in many important ways to educating and raising awareness in the community through:

- our comprehensive website [www.bfortoronto.ca](http://www.bfortoronto.ca) which in its second year continued to expand its reach to an average of over 4,000 visitors each month. Visitors from around the globe, including Uruguay, Costa Rica, France, New Zealand, Philippines, Lesotho, Israel and Iran found information, hope and healing through our online presence.
- an increase in our contact with Community Partner agencies – a growing list of over 400 hospitals, community agencies, funeral homes, schools with whom we have regular contact like the bi-annual public awareness newsletter *Lifeline*, and the distribution of over 3,500 of our newly designed services brochures
- presentations, workshops and information sharing at community events and with community organizations including Mental

Health Tune-up 2004, Meagan's Walk – Creating a Circle of Hope at the Hospital for Sick Children, Apotex employee health fair, Building Trades Union - Occupational Disease Intake Clinic, Ace Insurance, Threads of Life (Workplace Safety and Insurance Board), Humber College and Crime Concerns

### **Youth Outreach**

Since the groundwork was laid in 2003 for this newly created initiative, 2004 proved to be a very busy year. Our partnerships with both the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) continued to strengthen through these 12 months. Presentations were given to the majority of the staff social workers in both school boards, and intensive one-day trainings were provided to approximately 100 social workers from the TDSB. This training, co-facilitated by Vic Hill (Youth Outreach Worker) and Agnes Struik (BFO-Toronto Clinical Consultant), focused on how school social workers could better support grieving children and adolescents.

Given the positive feedback from these meetings, the demand for our programming increased. In 2004 the number of bereavement support groups for youth increased from 3 to 6, and for the first time within this program, one-to-one support sessions were provided to over 40 grieving young people.

In addition, we also produced the video "Behind Closed Doors: Youth Talk about Grief" in April of last year, which has received praise both within professional circles and amongst grieving adolescents. This video has become incorporated into our one-to-one process and into our training/outreach repertoire.

We look forward to all of the exciting and innovative things to come from this program in the years to come!

### **BLACK COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

Bereaved Families of Ontario-Toronto is committed to becoming more accessible to and reflective of diverse, racialized communities, in order that more bereaved people, particularly those who come from underserved communities, can benefit from BFO-Toronto's programs and services.

*We will achieve this through:*

- 1) internal capacity building – becoming a more inclusive, accessible and diverse organization;
- 2) building and strengthening partnerships with racialized communities, specifically the Black community and youth;
- 3) strengthening the ability of communities and organizations to provide bereavement support to their members, and
- 4) providing accessible, culturally competent and age-appropriate programs that meet the needs of individuals and communities.

The Black Community Outreach Program was made possible through a two-year grant provided by Canadian Heritage. By fostering and strengthening relationships and partnerships, based on mutual support, with Black community organizations and groups, BFO-Toronto believes it can play a critical role in providing support to a community that is presently experiencing enormous amounts of grief and loss.

In 2004 we hired a Black Community Outreach Worker, Janina Joseph-Walker, whose task it was to begin to develop community partnerships. She worked closely with Black community groups; met with staff from organizations who serve the Black community and provided culturally specific training for bereaved mothers from this community. One of BFO-Toronto's goals for 2005 is to continue to connect with key community organizations and groups, in order that mutually beneficial, working relationships will be formed to better support the bereaved, Black community.