

# Children's Grief & Loss Support in Rural Iowa

## Program Update | July 2024

EveryStep's Grief and Loss Services – Home of Amanda the Panda (ATP), addresses the mental health needs of rural Iowa students with school-based grief support groups delivered to their communities. By building relationships with local principals, guidance counselors, school nurses, and teachers, staff deliver 6-week peer support groups where students share their grief stories, connect with peers, and learn resilience skills to feel better equipped to cope with grief in healthy ways.

During the 2023-24 school year, ATP staff have expanded rural programming with community outreach events for educators, community members, and families. Examples include mental health fairs, partnerships with library programs, and day camps for students to bridge gaps in access to grief and loss support over the summer months.

## School Counselor Praises EveryStep's In-School Student Grief Groups



A school counselor for eight years, including two in the Creston School District, Sherry Blair has worked with students in all grade levels. She has seen the need for the EveryStep Grief & Loss school-based groups.

"Death is difficult for anybody at any life stage, but it's a challenging concept for pre-teens and teenagers who are just figuring their own selves out. To be able to have this

group to process all those things makes them feel like they're not having to face it all by themselves," says Blair.

While many students benefit from grief support following the death of a loved one, others are grieving loss due to different circumstances, like divorce, parental incarceration, and more.

"Students may experience trauma losing the family dynamic they were used to," says Blair. "These changes may feel like a connection loss versus a death loss and that can really impact the mental health of some students. It was nice to have this school group so they could talk with their peers and the EveryStep facilitator, as well as myself. It's just one more person on the team for these kids."

## RECAP

SEPT. 2023 – JUNE 2024

**1,174**

Rural children, teachers and community members served

**209**

Students served through school-based support group sessions

- 125 Elementary School
- 84 Middle/High School

**933**

Students, staff and caregivers served through outreach events

**16**

Schools served

**51**

Grief toolkits given to school counselors to equip them with tools to support grieving students

**2**

Day camps held

**Riding The Waves of Grief Day Camp**

West Des Moines - Polk County

- 20 Elementary & Middle School Students

**Soaring Your Way Through Grief Day Camp**

Creston - Union County

- 12 Elementary & Middle School Students

**1**

Traumatic event response

ATP served as a traumatic loss content expert and grief response coordinator in the aftermath of the Perry High School shooting on January 4, 2024.

# SUPPORT GROUP SURVEY RESULTS

- 93%** felt connected to peers within the support group
- 87%** felt comfortable expressing thoughts and feelings about their loss
- 88%** reported that they improved their knowledge of coping skills
- 95%** felt supported in their loss by the group



## 2023-2024 PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

<b>Collins Maxwell Elementary</b>	<i>Maxwell - Story County</i>
<b>Creston Elementary</b>	<i>Creston - Union County</i>
<b>Creston Middle</b>	<i>Creston - Union County</i>
<b>Emerson Hough Elementary</b>	<i>Newton - Jasper County</i>
<b>Indianola Middle</b>	<i>Indianola - Warren County</i>
<b>Lamoni Elementary</b>	<i>Lamoni - Decatur County</i>
<b>Lamoni Middle</b>	<i>Lamoni - Decatur County</i>
<b>Lamoni High</b>	<i>Lamoni - Decatur County</i>
<b>Lenihan Intermediate</b>	<i>Marshalltown - Marshall County</i>
<b>Nevada Elementary</b>	<i>Nevada - Story County</i>
<b>Oskaloosa Middle</b>	<i>Oskaloosa - Mahaska County</i>
<b>Perry Elementary</b>	<i>Perry - Dallas County</i>
<b>Perry Middle</b>	<i>Perry - Dallas County</i>
<b>South Hamilton Jr/Sr High</b>	<i>Jewell - Hamilton County</i>
<b>Winterset Elementary</b>	<i>Winterset - Madison County</i>
<b>Winterset Middle</b>	<i>Winterset - Madison County</i>

## OUTREACH EVENTS AND SPECIAL SUPPORTS (2023-2024 SCHOOL YEAR)

**Perry School District** *Perry - Dallas County*  
 Provided grief support and resources to students, staff, and families impacted by shooting.

**Prairie City Monroe High School** *Monroe - Jasper County*  
 Hosted resource booth for students and staff at mental health fair.

**West Elementary** *Polk City - Polk County*  
 Provided grief education to 2nd grade classroom and demonstrated how to be supportive to a grieving friend.

**Laura Ingalls Wilder Elementary** *Indianola - Warren County*  
 Provided grief education to 1st grade students.

**Ericson Public Library** *Boone - Boone County*  
 Hosted resource booth at summer reading kickoff event for youth and families.

**Pella Public Library** *Pella - Marion County*  
 Provided presentation for caregivers on "How to Support Grieving Children and Teens" and hosted remembrance event for members of the community.

**Winterset Rotary Club** *Winterset - Madison County*  
 Provided education on program services.

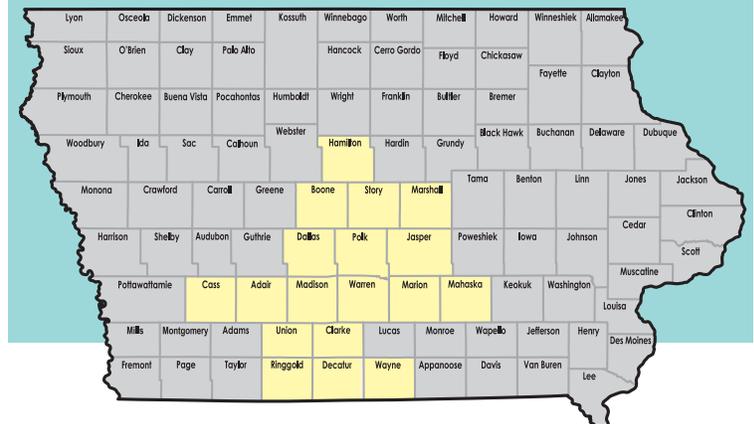


## USE OF FUNDS

Personnel	\$148,400
Supplies	\$5,930
Communications	\$293
Marketing/Client Resources	\$6,798
Mileage/Travel	\$1,862
Admin/Other	\$36,717
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$200,000</b>

## COUNTIES SERVED TO DATE

Adair	Dallas	Madison	Polk	Warren
Boone	Decatur	Mahaska	Ringgold	Wayne
Cass	Hamilton	Marion	Story	
Clarke	Jasper	Marshall	Union	



**Home of Amanda the Panda**

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