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## **Fernside: A safe place to mourn, heal**

*Editorial*

Greater Cincinnati is home to its share of firsts and bests, but few are more significant - or poignant - than Fernside: A Center for Grieving Children.

For 20 years, Fernside has broken the silence that often surrounds grieving children and stopped the isolation. The Blue Ash center offers peer support groups, resources, referrals, school programs, parent programs and a summer camp for bereaved children.

It gives kids not what adults think they need, but what the children themselves know they need - to be able to mourn wholly and freely.

At Fernside, they can talk about the family member or friend who died. In other places, children sometimes feel the mere mention of the person's name will cause discomfort.

At Fernside, children can lay out the secret fears that they can't express to grieving parents or other adults - did I cause this death, will this happen to me? In the outside world, adults are often so uncomfortable with mourning children they promote putting on a happy face and getting back to "normal" - as if life will ever be the same again.

Fernside is an inescapably happy place, a place that celebrates life even as it deals with the realities of loss. It tells children that even if the person is physically gone from them, the relationship continues. And it lets them draw, write and play out their emotions until they feel the reality of it.

Fernside's programs are mental health services at their best. They give children the tools to work through their grief rather than hide it, and a safe and caring community to work in.

Along with her husband, Paul, Rachel Burrell started Fernside in 1986 after their son David was killed and there were few community supports for their other children. From 16 children meeting in two groups, Fernside has grown to serving more than 4,600 children and adults in support groups and school and community programs last year.

"Our credo evolved - a safe and loving non-judgmental haven for grieving children and teens," Rachel Burrell writes of Fernside's start. "We would learn from the children, and they would create the place."

And what a magnificent place they created.

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