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Multiple losses, special challenges

by John Johnston

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Most of the children who come to Fernside are dealing with one loss - the death of a loved one. But for some children, life is even more complicated, with multiple losses.

Tyra Warner works with such children. She's a recreational therapist in a psychiatric unit at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

"For a lot of our kids, recent loss is barrier for them in their treatment," said Warner, a Finneytown resident who has been at Children's almost three years. "I came here, and I thought we needed this piece addressed."

Warner knew of Fernside because it collaborates with her former employer, Hamilton County Developmental Disabilities Services, to offer customized grief support groups. Fernside's Special Collaborations program also works the Butler County Juvenile Justice Center, the Children's Home of Cincinnati, the Warren County Learning Center and Clermont County Developmental Disabilities Services.

Fernside held its first six-week support group in Children's psychiatric unit about a year ago. Christi Kettman, Fernside's outreach coordinator, led it.

In addition to a death, the children had experienced many losses - they no longer had control, for example, over when to eat or when to go to bed, what they wear or who they see daily. The first step was helping them identify those losses and work through them, Kettman said.

"It was harder for them to have an awareness of how the death affected them. They were already struggling with some mental health issues, difficulty in school and interacting with peers. The death just exacerbated that."

With Kettman's help, the children were able to express their feelings through words and artwork.

After observing the classes, Warner decided to become a Fernside volunteer. She soon expects to lead orientation sessions.



Recreational therapist Tyra Warner leads a game at Fernside.

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