

Accord Hospice's Camp SOAR: Grief camp for children experiencing loss of loved one

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LAKESIDE — Accord Hospice of the White Mountains held its first annual Grief Camp for Kids, Camp SOAR, earlier this fall at Camp Tatiyee in Lakeside. Camp SOAR is a day camp for children who have experienced the loss of a significant loved one through death, divorce, or distance.

“The focus of our camp is sharing memories, trying new things and learning we are never alone in our grief,” Camp Director Keli McHenry said.

Over 40 children and 26 trained community volunteers descended on Camp Tatiyee for an entire Saturday and participated in arts and crafts, sports, games, archery, storytelling, journaling and many other activities aimed at providing support, healing and memories.

The Camp was also visited by a therapy and service animal organization and the Pinetop-Lakeside Fire Department, which offered rides and tours of its fire trucks.

The camp concluded with a balloon release of special messages written by the children to lost loved ones.

Diedra Kearney, co-owner of Accord Hospice, said the camp had been a long-standing goal of the agency, which has served the White Mountains now since 2013, providing hospice and bereavement services to over 150 families.

“We have always had grief and bereavement services for adults, but we recognized early on, a gap in those services for children here in the White Mountains, and we are just thrilled to provide such a necessary program for the community,” Kearney said.

She added that nearly 1.5 million children nationwide are living in a single-family household because of the death of one parent and one out of every 20 children age 15 and younger will suffer the loss of one or both parents.



"Firefighters in training"

"Firefighters in training" Alaina Lavender, 8, and Allyna Figueroa, 11, mug for the camera at the first annual Grief Camp for Kids, Camp SOAR, held this fall at Camp Tatiyee in Lakeside. The campers were visited by therapy and service animal organization and the Pinetop Fire Department, which offered rides and tours of their fire trucks.

Research suggested grieving children are at a much greater risk than their peers for depression, suicide, poverty and substance abuse, she noted.

“Our vision is to provide children access to bereavement services in an environment where they are encouraged to and allowed to feel like normal kids. Sometimes just knowing they are not alone helps children cope with their grief,” McHenry said.

Accord would like to thank their generous sponsors, White Mountain Hospice Foundation, K&L Transport, High Mountain Reiki, Haven of Lakeside and Show Low and Dr. Craig R. West, as well as the “wonderful folks” at Camp Tatiyee.

Planning for next year’s camp is already underway and Accord is happy to have additional volunteers and support from the community. For more information, contact McHenry at 928-271-8013.