

## What Do You Get From Attending A TCF Support Meeting

By Joy Van Raalte, in loving memory of her son Mark

I remember walking into my very first TCF support meeting with great sadness in my heart, wondering if I was doing the right thing, dragging my feet as if I had a huge weight on my shoulders and very scared and anxious about what happened at these meetings.

When I entered the room I could hear people laughing and I was so angry and I thought "Why are they laughing, don't they know my son has just died". I was just about to turn around and walk out I was so upset when a very kind, gentle, caring lady approached me and said "Hello my name is Julia, you must be Joy, come on in and join us".

I have never looked back from that night and attended support meetings for many years, planning other arrangements around my TCF support meeting just so I could attend. Why?, you may ask, well after that first meeting I left feeling better off than some of the people that I had met that evening. As we sat in a circle to share our stories (and I was told I did not have to if I did not want to) I was overwhelmed when the lady next to me shared her story and she had lost two of her children, then the next lady to share her story had lost her only child, others had lost their child under circumstances that required ongoing distress such as court cases etc.

I found myself thinking thank goodness I have not lost my only child or two of my children or having to deal with the ongoing circumstances surrounding the death of my child. As we sat in that circle and shared our stories and a mother reached out and held the hand of another who was sobbing uncontrollably, and later another put her arm around the shoulder of another, then another would take a box of tissues to someone else crying, I began to realize that I was in the right place, a place where I could talk about my child over and over, a place where they understood that stabbing ache in my heart, why I couldn't get out of bed in the morning and why I thought about nothing but my dead child.

I began to make beautiful friendships and build a strong support network through the amazing people that I met at each meeting. Slowly I became stronger in knowing that I did not have to suffer this long road ahead alone and eventually I was able to help a newly bereaved parent who was attending a meeting for the first time and was probably feeling the same feelings that I did at that time.

I realize now that we do laugh again, the heaviness in our hearts lightens and the memories of our child/children grow stronger as time goes by and they are never forgotten.

Caring thoughts, Joy Van Raalte, TCF Co-ordinator