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Helping Hands

Winter 2014

Grieving moms share comfort

On January 19, 2011, our second son, Corbin, was born still at 40 weeks gestation. It was a complete shock. My pregnancy was normal, my kick count chart was full . . . we had no reason to believe that anything was wrong until I had gone into labor and our midwife was unable to find our baby's heart beat. Our beautiful son was born six hours later. He weighed 9 pounds, 13 ounces and was 21 inches long. My husband and I left the hospital later that night with empty arms and broken hearts.

The morning after, our midwife came over to see how we were doing. She carried a heavy bag. "I have something for you," she said. She pulled out a blue and white flannel heart. She told me that it was a pillow that weighed 9 pounds, 13 ounces, and that another mama who lost her baby had sewed it for me.



A HEART TO HOLD

She went on to explain that mamas who lose babies heal better with something to hold in their arms. She explained that my arms would probably ache because my body was expecting a baby to hold. She was right. As the days passed they did ache. Holding the heart helped. It also helped soothe my jangly nerves. I carried that heart everywhere. I slept with it, ate with it, laid on the couch with it . . . If I wasn't holding it, my husband or our oldest son was. It provided so much comfort to me and my family. It was a gift, born of the deepest sadness, that represented love and kindness and would come to represent hope and healing.

As the days passed, I knew that we needed to share the gift that we received with other families. In July of 2011, my husband and I launched *A Heart to Hold*. Our mission is to offer comfort to families who have experienced pregnancy and infant loss by creating and sharing the gift of a weighted handmade heart. Hearts are sewn by volunteers through our Hearts from Afar Program and are filled at workshops in and around Sacramento. As of September 2014, we have made and shipped an amazing 2,500 hearts to 2,500 grieving families.

Thank you for visiting! Please take a look around the website or head over to our Facebook page where we update more frequently.

Abigail and Dave Crouch

A Heart to Hold Founder

<http://www.ahearttohold.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/AHearttoHold>



"AN ANGEL BABY'S CUDDLE SENT TO A FAMILY IN NEED"

We lost our angel, Molly Christine, at 34 weeks on May 30, 2010. I had not felt our active girl all day on the 29th. That night I went to the hospital to get checked and make sure Molly was alright. We were told that our precious daughter no longer had a heartbeat. She died from a tight, true knot in her cord. Devastated would not even begin to describe how we felt.

I was given a weighted teddy bear from a dear friend from high school. This bear weighed three pounds. In an effort to have a bear that weighed the same as Molly, I bought a shell and a package of rice. In the middle of the produce aisle, I carefully weighed rice, fluff and the shell. I am sure people thought I was crazy, but I did not care. I went home and with my children and husband, we created the very first Molly Bear. For the first time in weeks, I was able to sleep holding her. It was then that I knew I had to find a way to help other angel families.

I started making these bears for other angel mommies that I had become close to in several support groups. I had committed to one bear per paycheck and soon I had requests and a desire to make more. I went to my sister Amanda and I was venting about what I wanted and that I wasn't sure how to make it happen. In a few hours she called me back with a plan, and within a week we jumped in — feet first.

We officially started in August 2010, and currently have over 7,000 orders and have created over 5,500 bears. We are in 50 states and 24 countries. Often times we are in awe of the amount of people who say Molly's name. Words can not describe how humbled we are. This road has been hard and continues to be long, but we travel one day at a time and we are in wonderful company.

Thank you for visiting our site. Please fill out an order form (order form opens the 30th of every month), sign into the community, and if you are able, please make a donation so that we can continue our mission.

Bridget Crews, Molly Bears Founder

<http://www.mollybears.com/>

<http://www.mollybears.com/our-story/molly-bears-team>

Helping After Neonatal Death

Chapters:

HAND of the Peninsula

HAND of Santa Cruz

HAND of San Francisco

P.O. Box 3693

Redwood City, CA 94064

(650) 579-0350 crisis line

(650) 367-6993 office

www.HANDsupport.org

**Helping After Neonatal Death
Santa Clara and Alameda Counties,
and part of the Central Valley
P.O. Box 341
Los Gatos, CA 95031-0341
(888) 908-HAND (4263)
www.handonline.org**

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Helping Hands

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Submission deadline:
FEB. 1, 2015

Three HAND of the Peninsula parents join board

Liz DeWinter and husband Sean, lost their second child Wyatt Lee DeWinter in 2009, at 38 weeks gestation from cord compression. They have a 9-year-old son, Peyton, and moved from Connecticut to San Mateo in 2012. Liz is a member of the San Mateo Public Library Foundation's auxiliary board, the Literary Society, and active in her son's school.

"I did not receive the support of a group like HAND of the Peninsula when we lived in Connecticut," Liz said. "In fact, I had not actually spoken to anyone who had lost a baby until Ellen (Daley, HAND president) and I spoke for the first time in March. I learned of HAND online after reading about the movie *Return To Zero* which inspired me to do more. I am so grateful to HAND and all the wonderful volunteers and board members for the important work they do. I am interested in serving on the board so that I can help women receive the support I did not receive in 2009."



Liz and Sean DeWinter of San Mateo

Jessica Tolerba and husband Ben of San Jose, lost twins in March 2012. Babies Owen and Payton were monochorionic/monoamniotic twins delivered at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital via emergency c-section. Owen was stillborn and Payton died four days later.

Jessica started attending HAND grief meetings soon after their deaths. They have three living children, Megan, 7 1/2, Nathan 4 1/2 and 18-month-old sister Quinn, which means fifth born. Jessica, who teaches fourth grade in Palo Alto, is a HAND meeting facilitator and decided to join the board to honor her babies as well as help other moms and dads who are suffering the loss of their baby(ies). "It helps people in the 'outside world' understand that my babies have meaning and will always be a part of our lives," Jessica explained.



Jeff, Grace and Sara Johnson, of San Francisco

Sara Johnson and husband Jeff lost twin babies, Oliver and Isabella, on Feb. 13, 2009, due to preterm labor. Sara had already experienced four miscarriages. After losing twins, she knew they would need outside support in addition to family and friends and so began attending HAND meetings in San Francisco where they live with their daughter, Grace.

"We met many wonderful bereaved parents and still remain friends with some today. It was one of our lifelines during that traumatic time," Sara said. "For some time now, I have wanted to give back to the organizations that helped us through our losses and grief, as well as help other bereaved parents. Helping with the HAND support groups and board is one way I feel like I can reach out to other parents who have gone through similar losses. I want to be there for others to listen and to let them know that they will survive and live happy lives again.

"I will forever remain changed by losing Oliver and Isabella. I have been broken open and I am a different person, not better and not worse—just different. I hope that by telling my story and sitting with others that are grieving, we can find peace—or something like it."

Support Meetings

Support meetings are informal gatherings where parents can receive and give support by sharing common experiences as we work through and resolve our loss. We cordially invite you to attend.

Meetings may start out with a topic of discussion, but everyone is free to bring up any questions or aspects of their loss which may concern them.

Attending your first meeting does take courage, but parents who attend find a comforting network of support, encouragement, friendship and understanding.

Nothing is required of you. There are no dues or fees. You need not speak one word. Even if you no longer need the meetings for yourself, come and share your experiences with someone who has recently suffered a loss.

HAND of the Peninsula

Support meetings are held on the first and third Wednesday of the month.

Contact: (650) 367-6993

Time: 7:30-9:30 P.M.

Dates: Dec. 3 and 17

Jan. 7 and 21, **2015**

Feb. 4 and 18

March 4 and 18

Location: Follow signs to Palm Room at Mills Health and Wellness Center, 100 S. San Mateo Dr., San Mateo

HAND of Santa Cruz

Support meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month. Contact: Kristie Shulman (831) 438-4513

Time: 7:30-9:30 P.M.

Date: Dec. 17

Jan. 21, **2015**

Feb. 18

March 18

Location: Congregational Church of Soquel

HAND of San Francisco

Support meetings are held on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Contact: Chris Lehr, LCSW, LCS 14838 (415) 282-7330. Please call ahead to verify meeting room.

Time: 6:30-8:30 P.M.

Dates: Dec. 3 and 17

Jan. 7 and 14, **2015**

Feb. 4 and 18

March 4 and 18

Location: Davies Campus of CPMC, Castro at Duboce

Pregnancy Support Meetings

Parents who are pregnant again after a loss have special emotional and psychological needs. Pregnancy Support Group meetings address the concerns of bereaved parents who have started or are thinking about starting another pregnancy. Fathers are especially encouraged to attend.

HAND of the Peninsula

Subsequent pregnancy support meetings are held on the second Wednesday of the month at Mills Health and Wellness Center, 100 S. San Mateo Dr., in San Mateo. Contact: (650) 367-6993. Please RSVP if you plan to attend.

Time: 7:30-9:30 P.M.

Dates: Dec. 10

Jan. 7, **2015**

Feb. 11

March 11

HAND of Santa Cruz

Subsequent pregnancy meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the first Wednesday of each month at the Congregational Church of Soquel. **RSVP** is appreciated. Contact: Kristie Shulman (831) 438-4513

Births

Truman Agbai — Aug. 2014, to Natasha and Chike Agbai

Sahana Raji Mascarenhas — Oct. 2014, to Archana Jayakumar and Brian Mascarenhas

Donations

Our warmest thanks to those who have sent donations to HAND of the Peninsula. It is through your support that HAND is able to grow and help others.

Vivian and Frank Bossuwe, in memory of Laetitia Mei Bossuwe's 10th birthday
Emily and John Corpos, in memory of Maria Angelina Corpos
E Donnelly
Twila Forbes, in memory of Cosmo Forbes
Clorox Corporation Foundation matching gift for donation by **Laura and Jim Young**
Susan and Barry Hildes in memory of Wyatt Lee DeWinter
Lisa and Richard Jones in memory of Chance Kele
Ronald Pulliam
Joanne and Michael Regalia
Cathy Ridenour
Christina Rivas-Louie
Hazel and Gary Simin, in honor of Cheryl Gagliasso's and David Belshaw's marriage
Anna and Rob Strong
Julie Van Gelder and Brent Gregory, in memory of Ben Gregory
Minna Baughman, in memory of Amy Evelyn Cibuzar
Deborah Jean Van Olst, in honor of the marriage of Cheryl Gagliasso and David Belshaw
Local Independent Charities of America
Lisa and Andrew Cope, in memory of Charles Joseph Cope
Thomas Corso
Mary and William Schorr, in honor of Daniel Patrick Schorr
Jean Smith, in honor of Dr. David and Mrs. Cheryl Gagliasso-Belshaw
Kritiya and Mark Gee, in memory of Henry Grape, Brian Blueberry and Christopher Plum
Parsiri and Dave Stelnik in memory of Mila Nalin Stelnik
Jodi Perelman and Brad Shapiro

A decorative border of light gray hearts surrounds the text. The hearts are arranged in a grid pattern, with some hearts slightly overlapping.

HAND of the Peninsula
VOLUNTEER TRAINING

Saturday, January 24, 2015

9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Mills Health Center, San Mateo

Lunch will be provided

For HAND parents interested in giving back by facilitating meetings, offering peer support to parents with a recent loss either on the phone or one-on-one, serving on the Board of Directors, fundraising and event planning, assisting with outreach to local hospitals and healthcare providers, conducting inservice trainings or providing office support.

The morning session will be a general orientation for all new volunteers. The afternoon session will be specific to peer support and facilitating meetings, and current facilitators are invited to participate in that part of the training. Any new volunteers wishing to provide peer support, facilitate meetings, or do inservices should attend the whole training; however, if you are ONLY interested in non-direct-support activities such as serving on the Board, helping with events or providing office support, you could just come to the general orientation in the morning and not stay for the second part of the training.

The training is free and you are welcome to participate whether you feel ready to jump in and help right away or down the road.

**For more information call (650) 367-6993 or email
volunteers@HANDsupport.org**

A decorative border made of small grey diamonds surrounds the text. The border is composed of two parallel lines of diamonds, with the inner line being slightly offset from the outer line, creating a frame around the content.

SF HAND

Co-facilitators sought to keep group going

The San Francisco chapter of HAND is looking for alumni to keep that chapter going. Longtime facilitator Chris Lehr will retire in March 2015. We invite you to be on a team of rotating co-facilitators who are scheduled on a quarterly basis. Anyone interested is encouraged to call Chris Lehr at (415) 282-7330 and to come to a San Francisco HAND meeting soon to support others. Come co-facilitate with your partner or someone you've met at HAND meetings! Volunteer training will take place Saturday, Jan. 24, 2015, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. and is free. See description of volunteer training inside this issue.