



A healing center for grieving children & teens  
Ann Arbor  
Capital Region  
Greater Flint and Genesee County  
West Michigan

Ele's Place Administrative Office  
1145 W. Oakland Avenue  
Lansing, MI 48915

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# Ele's Place Michigan

## 2019 Spring Newsletter



### Caleb Britten Family Story

When Caleb Britten was three years old his father died. He had a heart attack while driving to work and swerved into oncoming traffic. He hit another car head on killing a young couple. Not only was Caleb's life changed that day, but so were the lives of two other families'.

After his dad's death, Caleb attended Ele's Place. Unfortunately, Caleb was so young at this point in his life, he has no real memory of his time at Ele's Place and the tremendous help offered to him. Caleb said, "I was a young child with a broken heart, and I didn't even know it. Even if I had, I wouldn't have been capable of fixing it alone".

In spite of the fact that his first time being a part of program is not even a memory for Caleb, he has had the opportunity as an adult to experience the safe space of Ele's Place to grieve openly and without judgment. Taking an internship and volunteering as a greeter at Ele's Place-Capital Region in the Fall of 2017, soon turned into a volunteer opportunity as a volunteer facilitator in the peer support groups held on-site at all Ele's Place locations across Michigan. Because he was unable to remember his own time at Ele's Place becoming a volunteer facilitator provided a whole new opportunity to see the value of the Ele's Place groups, and to be astounded by the courage and resilience of the children of Ele's Place. In his new role at Ele's Place, Caleb is sure he will never forget being a part of program this time around. "I will never forget the welcoming I was given by six strangers all experiencing life changing tragedy," says Caleb.

*(Top) Caleb and his father. (Right) Caleb (L) and his friend Jerome (R).*

"The all-inclusive solidarity at Ele's is remarkable and to be able to bring my experience full circle is serendipitously rewarding.

**Being a part of the healing these brave kids and teens are going through is a life changing experience and I have never been happier to do something for free."**

Today, 23 years after his father's death, Caleb is proud to have graduated from Michigan State University with two degrees, works hard at two jobs in his community, and shares his time and experience with the kids of Ele's Place as a facilitator. Caleb is humble about his accomplishments, and gives a great deal of credit to the power of cohesive healing he has experienced at Ele's Place both as a child and today as an adult. Although he doesn't remember his time at Ele's Place as a three-year-old, he still feels the effects are resounding. Caleb shares, "Tragedy and grief wait for no person. It is the only widespread phenomenon found in every culture. It affects everyone differently, and often times, people don't have an outlet to reach out to and become lost. Thankfully we have Ele's Place."



**THANK YOU!** 

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# Ele's Place - Capital Region

Kristine Kuhnert - Director



Helping families answer challenging questions about what it is like now and what is next after experiencing the death of someone close to you and your children is a key component of how we help our families develop and strengthen their coping skills each as part of Ele's Place programming. Family foundational questions are answered in our groups, every night, by people who understand how each other are feeling. For example, after the death of a child, how does a parent answer the question, "how many children do you have?" For the child that has experienced the death of a parent, how do they fill out the form when it requests 'parents name'. These issues are discussed and together as a group, with the support of those who have had a similar experience, the question is resolved.

*While it appears to be a collection of rooms on the surface, our program wing is a magical place where together people answer the foundational questions only they understand.*

A phrase that I live by is many hands make light work. I often find myself saying it at home to my own boys, and also to the team here at Ele's Place-Capital Region. We could not have provided services to more than 1000 individuals last year if it was not for the amazing gifts of time, treasure and talent. Please considering sharing yours. Here are some ways to support Ele's Place:

## TIME.



Ele's Place offers a variety of volunteer opportunities for men and women who want to make a positive difference in children's lives. Opportunities include working directly with our families, cleaning and yard work, helping to prepare art projects or volunteering at one of our events such as the Healing Heart Society Breakfast or Ele's Race at Jackson National Life. Last year, our volunteers donated more than 30,000 hours to our mission.

## TREASURE.



It costs Ele's Place about \$500 annually to provide services to one grieving child and \$2500 to run one Ele's Group, an 8-week school based program. Our families face many changes after a death, including financial issues. When a bereaved family calls Ele's Place for support, they do not have to worry about how they will pay for services. By ensuring Ele's Place services remain free to every child who needs them, we are able to ensure that no child grieves alone.

## TALENT.



Ele's Place is in need of the vast gifts our community brings. Consider sharing your personal talents, professional talents, share the mission of Ele's Place with those who may need it, or formalize the role and consider becoming an outreach ambassador.

Thank you, Capital Region, for continuing to believe in Ele's Place and for supporting the work we do with grieving children, teens, and their families.

Gratefully,  
Kristine Kuhnert



As Ele's Place looks to serve more children in our communities and across the state, Ele's Group, our school based program, is an excellent way for us to reach more and more children who are grieving the death of some close to them. This eight-week program, held in local schools within the service areas of our Ele's Place branches, allows those students who either self-identify, or have been identified by a school counselor or social worker to attend. The programming is offered free of charge to the school district, and the students, with the only requirement of the school being that a member of their counseling team join the group for the entire eight-week period.

Unresolved childhood grief can lead to negative behaviors including truancy and struggling in school. An administrator from one of our initial Ele's Group's shared that *students who had been experiencing a negative effect on their grades saw an increase after being in one session of Ele's Group.* Similarly, students who struggled with attendance and behavior saw improvement over the time they were able to attend Ele's Group.

While attendance and grades are key to success in school, so are the relationships and attachments students form. One of the major feelings grieving children report are those of isolation; there are few others in their peer group who have the same experience of grief and the challenges which follow that.

In one of our school groups, the counselor expressed concern about two young women being in group together, as they had a long history of a challenged relationship. Neither girl could get along with the other, and it placed a true strain on their school experience. The counselor did not want the behavior of these two to effect the ability for the group to be beneficial to the kids involved. Understanding this, the Ele's Group facilitator suggested that they try having the girls in the group together, and if it became too much, they would make a change. At the end of eight weeks, the girls were both still attending the group, and while a friendship had not blossomed, both girls admitted they knew they were there for each other to provide support. Said one of the students, "I have your back." Ele's Group provides that safe and supportive place in the school environment.



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