

# Group helps people cope with bereavement

MindCare New Brunswick grants \$10,000 to Camp Kerry Atlantic

DERWIN GOWAN  
TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

SAINT JOHN • Camp Kerry Atlantic hopes to expand its counselling and support program for families coping with bereavement, the group's co-ordinator Pam Pastirik said on Saturday.

A total of 10 families attended Camp Kerry Atlantic's inaugural "family bereavement retreat" at the Upper Oxbow Adventures sporting camp on the Little Southwest Miramichi last year.

The group could take as many as 20 families at a retreat set for Aug. 31 to Sept. 3 this year at Snider Mountain Ranch in the Sussex area if Camp Kerry Atlantic can raise the money to cover the expected cost, Pastirik said in an interview following the 30th annual Skate To Care fundraising event for MindCare New Brunswick at Harbour Station.

"So far we've raised about \$25,000. We have a very ambitious budget of about \$100,000," she said. The \$25,000 total to date includes a \$10,000 grant, part of the \$605,194 that MindCare New Brunswick announced for various groups following the closing ceremonies for Skate To Care.

"I was over the moon," Pastirik said about this contribution. Camp Kerry Atlantic needs to raise \$50,000, half the total needed, by June 1 before it can begin enrolling families for the retreat later this year, she said.



Pam Pastirik accepted a \$10,000 grant from MindCare New Brunswick on Saturday for Camp Kerry Atlantic's family bereavement counselling program. She and MindCare New Brunswick chairman Jean-Marc Poirier attended the 30th annual Skate To Care fundraising event at Harbour Station. PHOTO: DERWIN GOWAN/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

Pastirik's family turned to the Camp Kerry Society in British Columbia after her oldest child, Michael, died five years ago, on April 3, 2012, at 16.

Dr. Heather Mohan founded the Camp Kerry Society following the death

of Kerry Kirstuik from colon cancer in her 30s in December, 2006. Mohan met Kirstuik and her family while working in palliative care in Vancouver.

Standard bereavement groups and counselling often separates parents and

children unlike the Camp Kerry Society's family centred bereavement camps which Pastirik credits with helping her family, including her children Max and Nibolas and husband Dan.

"We felt the services that existed did

not allow us to honour our grief together as a family," Pastirik said on Saturday. "I told my kids it's a vacation with a purpose. We are going to learn some new ways to be without Michael ... so it was an opportunity for our family to be together but for my children to get help." Max is 18, Nicholas 16, today. Michael would have been 20.

Pastirik, who teaches family care nursing at the University of New Brunswick's Saint John campus, made it her mission to bring the Camp Kerry Society to the east coast.

She said the group needs administrative support but, for now, an eight-member volunteer committee run Camp Kerry Atlantic, a regional division of the organization based in British Columbia. There is also a Camp Kerry division in Ontario, she said.

Most of Camp Kerry Atlantic's money goes to the bereavement retreat but the group sponsors monthly community support groups and outreach education, too. The families have come from New Brunswick so far but there is interest from Nova Scotia, too, Pastirik said.

"If I won the lottery I would develop a bereavement centre. It would offer a variety of services," Pastirik said. She would also like to develop a "bereavement centre of excellence."

She and fellow nursing instructor Diana Dupont are collaborating on a program for perinatal loss and bereavement - "perinatal" referring to the period before and after birth.

Camp Kerry Atlantic, incidentally, entered a team in the Skate To Care and raised between \$600 and \$700, she said.