

2026 Good Grief Spring Institute Speaker Bios

DONNA L. SCHURMAN, EdD, FT

Donna L. Schuurman is Sr. Director of Advocacy & Education at Dougy Center: The National Grief Center for Children & Families in Portland, Oregon, where she has served in various roles since 1986, including 25 years as Executive Director. She writes and trains internationally on bereavement issues, and has authored numerous articles, book chapters, and the book, *Never the Same: Coming to Terms with the Death of a Parent*. Dr. Schuurman served as President of the Board of Directors for the Association for Death Education & Counseling and received their Annual Service Award in 2003 and their Clinical Practice Award in 2013. She is a member of the International Work Group on Death, Dying, and Bereavement, and a founding board member of the National Alliance for Children's Grief. She has been invited to assist communities following tragic school shootings and natural disasters; is regularly sought out by national media for interviews related to understanding and supporting children, teens, and adults when someone in their life dies; and provides expert witness testimony in wrongful death legal cases.

EVELYNN MOON, MA

Evelynn Moon has over 15 years of experience training thousands of educators and professionals on topics such as peer leadership, social emotional learning, empathy, self-care, and grief support. As Director of Learning & Content Strategy at Good Grief, she leads grief literacy initiatives for schools, prepares volunteers to facilitate peer support, and develops virtual learning programs. A skilled moderator, she has led panels on ACEs and grief, substance use and grief, and fire-side chats with grief experts, fostering conversations on loss, trauma, and resilience.

In addition to her work at Good Grief, Evelynn is a coach with BetterUp, supporting clients through life transitions with non-judgmental guidance and accountability.

Evelynn earned her Master of Arts in Educational Theatre from New York University-Steinhardt and her Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from Rutgers University.

GINA KORNFEIND, MSW, MEd

Gina Kornfeind is the Community Outreach & Training Manager at Good Grief, bringing over 30 years of experience in pediatric palliative care, bereavement support, and trauma-informed education. Previously a Pediatric Palliative Care and Bereavement Social Worker at UCLA Mattel Children's Hospital, Gina has extensive experience facilitating grief support groups, training educators, and working with families navigating serious illness and loss. She is passionate about equipping professionals with evidence-based strategies for

trauma-informed grief care across school and community settings. Gina is a Native Californian and recent (and very happy) transplant to NJ! She holds a Dual Masters Degree in Early Childhood Special Education and Social Work.

ANNETTE MENDEZ, BA, DMAI CERT.

Annette Mendez is the Training & Curriculum Manager at Good Grief, where she develops interactive grief education programs, oversees curriculum implementation, and supports training efforts for educators and community leaders. With a background in early childhood development and mental health, she has worked extensively in special education, early intervention, and trauma-informed teaching practices. As a former bi-lingual educator, Annette has a passion for working with and cultivating relationships with educators across districts to ensure they are more grief informed. Annette holds a BA from Montclair State University in Family and Child Life Studies, a Certificate in Developmental Models for Autism Intervention and is a certified Grief Educator.

DR. CHRISTINA LIPARINI, PhD, LPC

Dr. Christina Liparini is a licensed psychologist and counselor educator specializing in grief, trauma, and resilience-building. Dr. Liparini is the Assistant Professor of Psychology and Doctoral Program Director at St. Elizabeth's University. She earned both her M.A. and Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from Seton Hall University. She is a licensed psychologist and licensed professional counselor in New Jersey. After several years of volunteering at Good Grief, she joined the team as Program and Curriculum Advisor in January. Her research and clinical interests center around recognizing and supporting the unique experiences of those who are grieving.

KIM BURROWS, MS

Kim Burrows is the Program Director at Good Grief where she plays a central role in volunteer facilitator recruitment, management, and program coordination. Kim oversees all program operations, along with staff supervision to ensure the smooth delivery of Nights of Support and other core initiatives. Kim is also lead trainer for facilitator trainings where she finetunes the content and delivers a robust program. Additionally, she oversees data management, program logistics, and serves as a Team Coordinator on a Night of Support. She has a deep commitment to Good Grief's mission of supporting grieving children, families and volunteers. Kim also brings a deep understanding of the emotional complexities of grief having completed a Master of Science in Mental Health & Wellness with an emphasis on Grief & Bereavement.

MELISSA PEARCE, MA

Melissa Pearce is the Executive County Superintendent of Schools for the New Jersey Department of Education, where she provides leadership and oversight to school districts across the county. With more than two decades of experience in special education, educational psychology, and school leadership, she brings expertise in family engagement, trauma-informed practices, and systems-level support for students and educators.

Melissa has been involved with Good Grief for more than 15 years, beginning as a volunteer and growing into a trusted partner and advocate for the organization's work. She is deeply committed to strengthening educational communities so that children, families, and educators feel supported and equipped to navigate grief and adversity.

VERONICA C. ORTIZ, LPC

Veronica C. Ortiz (she/her/ella) is a dedicated bilingual (Spanish/English) Licensed Professional Counselor and certified School Counselor with 10+ years of mental health experience working with children, adolescents, and families in schools and community settings. She is a team player with the drive to help empower communities and recognized for being a passionate advocate for historically excluded populations. Veronica is currently the Training and Education Director at Imagine, A Center for Coping with Loss and delivers educational workshops and trainings on loss and grief.

MRITTIKA SEN, PhD

Mrittika Sen is the Head of Research & Evaluation at Good Grief, where she leads program evaluation, research initiatives, and data strategy to strengthen and inform grief support services. She develops evaluation tools, analyzes data, prepares reports for stakeholders, and collaborates with academic partners to advance knowledge about grief-informed practice. Mrittika earned her PhD in Communication Studies from Northwestern University and brings extensive experience in research design, interpersonal support, and organizational change. She is deeply committed to ensuring that Good Grief's programs are evidence-informed, responsive, and impactful for grieving children and families.

PAM SULLIVAN

Pam Sullivan is a Senior Advisor at Good Grief and has been part of the organization since its earliest days, serving in a variety of leadership and program roles. Over the past 18 years, she has consistently served as a peer group facilitator and Team Coordinator, holding space for grieving children, teens, and caregivers during Nights of Support. Pam has also led outreach efforts, donor engagement, and oversight of the Family Centers, always grounding her work in Good Grief's mission and values.

In her current role, Pam strengthens facilitator training, develops continuing education content, and supports program quality across the organization. She is deeply committed to companioning families and volunteers with steadiness, humility, and care.

CHRISTINA VERDESCA

Christina Verdesca is the Program Manager at Good Grief in Princeton, where she oversees Nights of Support, enrichment programming, volunteer coordination, and intern supervision. Christina joined Good Grief as an intern following a career pivot into the nonprofit and mental health field, and her role has grown into program leadership and organizational development.

She holds a bachelor's degree in Family Science and Human Development from Montclair State University and is currently pursuing a Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. Christina is deeply committed to creating steady, welcoming spaces for grieving children and families while continuing to deepen her clinical training and understanding of grief-informed practice.

ARIANA LOCASCIO

Ariana Locascio has experience in the hospital, mental health, and non-profit settings. Ariana graduated from Montclair State University with a B.A in Family and Child Studies with a concentration in Family Services. Ariana was a former a Child Life Specialist from 2017-2020. Ariana also has experience as a Case Manager in a Mental Health Center. Ariana was a former volunteer facilitator at Good Grief from 2015-2018 and then was hired on staff in 2021. Ariana's current role at Good Grief is the Senior Family Services Manager where she is the first point of contact for grieving families to enroll in peer support programs. She orients all new families, runs support groups, and supervises several staff members. Ariana's passion is helping others and in mission-driven work.

MARION WELLS, MA, MLS, NCC

Marion Wells is the Family Services Coordinator where she is the first point of contact for families interested in joining the Nights of Support program. She oversees the coordination and management of family support services in the Princeton Center, including guiding families from intake to ongoing participation in the Nights of Support program. She coordinates orientation sessions for families, maintains data records and provides ongoing communication with families throughout their entire experience at Good Grief. Marion has been a facilitator for adult groups since 2021 and currently serves in the Team Coordinator role. She recently completed her Masters in Clinical Mental Health Counseling at Rider University and has a Masters in Library Service from Rutgers University where she worked in leadership and research instruction in academic and special libraries.