



DEANA CARPENTER

From left, Kylie McCullough, Alex Craig and Tori Craig participate in the craft portion of Camp Healing Hearts.

Camp helps children cope with grief

By Deana Carpenter
For The Almanac
writer@thealmanac.net

Coping with the loss of a loved one can often be a difficult thing to do – especially for children. Now in its seventh year, Camp Healing Hearts, hosted by Family Hospice and Palliative Care's Center for Compassionate Care in Mt. Lebanon, helps children learn to cope with their grief.

The day camp, held Aug. 14, offered a way to "let kids know they're not alone," said Allison Holst, a bereavement specialist at Family Hospice and Palliative Care. The free camp, sponsored by the Pittsburgh Pirates Alumni Association, was open to any child in the area age 6 to 12 who has experienced the loss of a close loved one.

About 14 campers and their parents attended this year's Camp Healing Hearts, which featured activities that were geared toward helping children deal with grief. The children attending the camp participated in activities like drawing and



Camper James Davis uses some unique drum sticks on his drum during the music portion of camp.

making crafts as well as expressing themselves through music. Children also had a chance to make a memory box, in which they could put pictures and other items that reminded them of their loved one. Other activities included an obstacle course and sessions for parents.

The camp was founded seven years ago by Marilyn Cartwright, a former bereavement specialist at Family Hospice. Cartwright came back to this year's camp as a volunteer.

"A lot of time grief is not addressed with children," Cartwright said about why she started the camp. "I felt like in our community, there was nothing like this," she said. Cartwright added that she wanted a camp instead of a day of therapy because children would not likely be inclined to just talk about their feelings like adults. She thought activities like drawing and music would help the children heal while having fun.

"It's our hope that Camp Healing Hearts assists children in their grieving process by helping them learn that they are not alone in their grief – and what they feel is completely normal," said Greg Jenā, spokesman for Family Hospice. "Through various activities and interaction, Camp helps children realize that healing is possible," he said.

Cartwright said the camp is a way for children to "learn ways of dealing with their inside feelings."

"You're giving them the power to express their grief," she said. "We want this to be a positive experience."

Volunteers and cousins Jessica Jenkins and Constance McCauley said they volunteered at the camp as something to do as a family.

Brian Hawk of Delmont, who lost his wife, Kara, in April, attended the camp with his 5-year-old son, Declan.

He said before the camp, he hadn't really done any grief counseling, saying his family was coping on its own, but was happy with his decision to come to the camp.

"It was more than I had expected," Hawk said about the camp. He said he liked the camp because it offered small groups for the kids and more individual attention was able to be given to them.

He said he participated in the parent sessions and said it was nice to talk with "people going through similar situations," as he is. He said his son did great at the camp and that they would participate in next year's Camp Healing Hearts. He added that he would like to bring his 2-year-old daughter, Murphy, with him to camp when she is older.