Gratitude is rarely the first thought that enters the mind of the person beginning the journey of grief. Sorrow, loneliness, tears—those are the first mileposts along the way. The absence looms large—but eventually, remembrance brings gratitude for the life of the one dearly loved. When pressed, most griever would not choose a life without the one they loved, no matter how deep the sorrow that death brought.

At our Seeds of Remembrance event held in mid-May, Dave Buhler recounted the life of his son Matthew—a life cut short by suicide. Dave’s profound love of Matthew was poignantly conveyed as he recalled the events of Matthew’s life and of his character. Despite his grief, it was evident how grateful Dave was that Matthew had been—and still is—in his life. That gratitude allowed Dave to share his story and bring comfort and hope to others facing the emptiness of mourning. Gratitude is a practice. It can be derailed by grief; but flowers anew with remembrance, with shared recollections, with response to the suffering of others, and eventually—to contentment. We frequently observe this in our grief support groups as participants come to address their own grief, gain perspective, find themselves gently supporting others and in turn, receiving support.

Our gratitude extends to those who sustain us in our efforts—Larkin Mortuary, the Cambia Foundation, Coach Lora Erickson (theBlondeRunner), our facilitators and many volunteers. We have much to look forward to—the third annual Larkin Charity Golf Classic among them. Please look inside for news and information.

We welcome your feedback and ideas, and are grateful for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Kathie Supiano, PhD, LCSW
Director, Caring Connections
Upcoming Grief Groups
Fall 2013: Eight Weekly Sessions

Salt Lake City

September 4 - October 23, 2013
(Wednesday Evenings)
6:00 - 7:30 p.m. (All groups)

University of Utah College of Nursing
Annette Poulson Cumming Building
10 South 2000 East
Salt Lake City, UT 84112

This location offers seven types of grief groups, all in the evening:
• Children (7-11) - Adjusting to the death of a loved one
• Adolescents (12-17) - Adjusting to the death of a loved one
• Adjusting to the death of a loved one (adult traditional)
• Adjusting to the death of a spouse or partner
• Adjusting to the death of a loved one to suicide
• Adjusting to the death of a loved one to murder
• Adjusting to the death of a loved one to perinatal loss

Midvale (South Salt Lake)

September 5 - October 24, 2013
(Thursday Evenings)
6:00 - 7:30 p.m. (Two groups)

UUHC Greenwood Health Center
7495 South State Street
Salt Lake City, UT 84047

Two adult grief groups for those adjusting to the death of a loved one (traditional), or adjusting to the death of a loved one to suicide.

Orem

September 4 - October 23, 2013
(Wednesday Evenings)
5:30 - 7:00 p.m. (Two groups)

University of Utah Parkway Health Center
145 West University Parkway
Orem, UT 84058

Two adult grief groups for those adjusting to the death of a loved one (traditional), or adjusting to the death of a loved one to suicide.

Layton

June 27 - August 29, 2013
(Thursday Evenings, excluding July 4 and 25)
6:00 - 7:30 p.m.

Wingman Advocate Program Suicide Survivors Group
Adult grief group for those adjusting to the death of a loved one to suicide.
Even in the midst of grieving the death of a child, parents need to help their surviving children navigate their own grief. Sibling grief is an important and less understood phenomena. This study followed the course of bereavement in children and adolescents. Findings suggested that, despite parents’ concerns, there were very few school or behavior problems observed in grieving children. The authors attribute this to the parent’s ability to openly communicate the circumstances of the death in age appropriate ways “suggesting that adjustment and behavioral problems may be the exception rather than the rule during grieving.”

Another important theme that emerged from parental interviews in this study was siblings’ concern about parents’ well-being. This was observed in the surviving children explicitly avoiding any reference to the deceased child or expressing their own worries in the presence of their parents as attempts to protect a parent. The authors observe “that [the fact that] these instances are described by parents themselves speak to parental concern about their surviving children and the need for accessible and targeted palliative and bereavement counseling resources for bereaved children, adolescents, and parents.”
Most of the readers of this newsletter are intimately acquainted with loss and grief, and because of their life experiences, may be drawn to or reach out to others who are suffering. Yet, all of us can find ourselves at a loss for words, or uncertain about what to do when we learn of someone who has experienced the death of a loved one. We have learned from our participants how frustrated they feel at the well-intentioned but often thoughtless things people say or do in the time of grief.

The Joy of Helping

“The purpose of life is not to be happy—but to matter, to be productive, to be useful, to have made a difference that you have lived at all. - Leo Rosten

Despite the challenges of helping, many of which have been discussed in previous issues of this newsletter, supporting someone in their grief can be a deeply satisfying experience. Dale G. Larson, author of The Helper’s Journey, notes that helping is most rewarding and most successful when it is empathy-driven, not distress-driven. Empathy-driven helping is a natural outgrowth of relationship. This is why effective helpers feel that what they are doing is “natural”—that is, a genuine expression of their gifts and the feelings with the grievers. For helpers with a personal history of grief, this often means reconnecting with their own loss. In doing so, empathy-driven helpers do not rush to retell their own stories of suffering, nor offer advice. Remembering their own experience with sorrow, the empathic helper accepts the feelings and thoughts expressed by the grievers without judgment, or quietly attends to tangible needs.

For most helpers, the sense of connection with another human being is the most validating element of helping—and helpers find this sustaining long before problems are “solved,” needs are “met” or “thank-yous” are offered.

Meet Our Facilitators

Emogene Grundvig is a licensed clinical social worker working in the field of home care and hospice and a PhD student at the University of Utah. Her research is community-based research and explores the field of criminal justice, namely through the Salt Lake City’s Homeless Court and Salt Lake City’s Police Department’s Homeless Outreach Service Team.

Emogene began facilitating Caring Connections grief groups in the Winter of 2012 in an effort to learn from the support group dynamics. “Support Groups are a wonderful opportunity for individuals to collaborate on common experiences and normalize their thoughts, feelings and emotions,” she says. “To be involved in the grief groups and to assist with the process of healing is a sacred honor.”

In addition to the opportunity to connect with and support grief group participants, Emogene says she has been honored to work with the master’s of social students that help to co-facilitate the grief groups. “Bacall Hincks and Samuel Asante have been instrumental in providing education and support to the group members' experiences,” Emogene says. “These students are incredible, talented individuals that bring compassion, strength and knowledge to the group process.”
DyAnn Duckworth lost her best friend when her loving husband Jim died on July 26, 2012. His death came just nine days after he celebrated his 69th birthday, and one month after numerous health conditions had forced him to retire.

Together the Duckworths have three sons and daughter-in-laws and 11 grandchildren. Prior to Jim’s death, the couple’s youngest son Brandon, a Major league baseball player, had learned that the Red Sox were not going to bring him up to the team for the end of the season. Brandon and his wife Janeen were considering a baseball contract with a team from Japan, but they were concerned to move to another country in light of Jim’s health. Jim encouraged Brandon to sign the contract and told him that he wanted him to experience all of Japan and that he would be here on his return. “I believe Jim waited to leave this earth until Brandon was well on his way over the ocean and there was no way he could turn around and come back to Utah,” says DyAnn. When Brandon learned of his father’s death he made the difficult decision to remain in Japan, and dedicated the rest of the season to his father, even changing his jersey number to “69” in honor of Jim.

While family and friends provided constant support, DyAnn still struggled to manage her grief. A friend suggested that she call Caring Connections. “The group fit me like a glove and has helped me in so many ways,” DyAnn says. “I have become more open and stronger about my grief. I have learned that not everyone grieves the same. I know that there will be times of sadness. I take it as it comes, feel it and move on to the happier things in my life. What a blessing it has been for me.”

DyAnn acknowledges that she still experiences difficult times, such as her 46th wedding anniversary with Jim, which she spent at his graveside talking to him and playing their favorite songs. “It was a hard day for me,” she admits. “There are still times that are hard but, I know I am moving forward. I know my husband is here with me and I believe that he is helping me through the process.” She encourages others who are navigating the grief process to call Caring Connections. “Listen to every person in the group and above all, trust that through Caring Connections you will find the most inspiring facilitators and group members who can help you make a transition into a more happy and giving life than you have ever known.”

“You can shed tears that she is gone, or you can smile because she has lived.

You can close your eyes and pray that she’ll come back, or you can open your eyes and see all she’s left.

Your heart can be empty because you can’t see her, or you can be full of the love you shared.

You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday, or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.

You can remember her only that she is gone, or you can cherish her memory and let it live on.

You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back. Or you can do what she’d want: smile, open your eyes, love and go on.” David Harkins
As the director of a hospice children’s bereavement program and a facilitator for adult survivors of suicide support groups, I have talked with many children, teens and adults who are coping with the trauma of losing a loved one to suicide.

I am not a stranger to suicide loss. Just before I turned four years old, my mother killed herself with a gun. That was in 1951 when people believed that talking to children about the subject of death, and particularly suicide, should be avoided. My younger brother and I were told that she had “gone on vacation.” All of her personal belongs, all pictures of her, were put away. She just disappeared.

Later, when I overheard my dad tell someone on the phone that he was taking my brother and me “on vacation” to Lake Tahoe, I was terrified, thinking “vacation” was a place you went and never came back. I didn’t learn the truth of her death until I was eighteen, but the isolation and mystery surrounding her death troubled me throughout my childhood.

As a psychotherapist and grief counselor, I understand that imparting such information is very painful. Telling your child about the suicide of a special person may seem like an impossible task, especially because you may be so undone yourself that you wonder if you can even get the words out. Maybe there is a part of you that clings to the hope that the death was an accident. You may wonder if you should say the word suicide or if there is a “right” way to tell your child.

I have learned that children who experience the suicide death of a loved one do best when they get honest information about what has happened—in doses suitable for their age. Finding the words to impart the grim news of a loved one’s suicide is very hard. You may be tempted to “protect” her from such traumatic information by telling her “white lies” or half-truths. However, without a truthful account, children tend to make up their own stories. Such self-explanations can create even more confusion, fear and isolation. Your honesty is also critical because a suicide often leaves a child feeling betrayed and vulnerable. While shielding a child from the truth may seem like a kindly act, deception may interfere with the trust bond.

When you are ready to talk with your youngster about the death, place her on your lap (or next to you) and start with a simple statement that “Daddy (or whoever) has died.” This will be very hard, and it

Sharing rather than hiding grief allows for children to learn about feelings. A caring adult who explains that he is “very, very sad, and when we are sad, sometimes we cry,” gives children words to describe what is happening. Given that children often mimic the behavior of others, if they are able to observe healthy grieving responses, they often respond similarly and are able to learn important lessons about expressing themselves. They can also learn that death is a part of life, and that the feelings we have around the loss of someone special can be expressed and managed. Take time for yourself before talking to your child, if possible. Give yourself the opportunity to talk with someone who understands the dynamics of suicide and who can help you sort out what you want to say to your child. You may want to ask a trusted family member, friend or professional mental health counselor to be with you as you tell your child. That person can support both of you as you try to cope with the initial response to this traumatic news.

“...do best when they get honest information about what has happened—in doses suitable for their age.”
is okay if you cry. If your child is very young, you may need to explain in concrete terms what “died” means by using examples a child this age can understand. (“When a person dies, his body stops working. His heart stops beating and he no longer breathes. He can’t eat or talk or move. He can’t hear or see anymore because he is no longer alive. He is dead.”) Avoid using euphemisms such as “passed away,” “expired” or “transitioned.” Such explanations, while intended to help, often only confuse children, who know something terrible has happened.

A young child whose pet has died or who has experienced the death of a grandparent may have some idea of what “dead” means, but since the notion of suicide will not be in his realm of understanding, you will not want to include that piece in the initial statement. Most young children will not ask how, but may ask “Why?” or “Who will take care of me?” or “Are you going to die, too?” Such questions need to be addressed in a straightforward manner.

If a child asks a direct question, such as, “How did he die?” answer it simply. “Daddy died by suicide, which means he killed himself.” This will be confusing to a young child, and your continued dialogue will depend on her response to that statement. If she asks why (older children who have more understanding of death and suicide will want more information), you can tell her you aren’t sure yet, but that he was probably suffering from an illness in his brain that made him confused, and he didn’t know he could get help.

In addition to a truthful explanation, children need reassurance that the suicide was not their fault, and that they could not have done anything to prevent it. Like adults, children wrestle with concerns that their thoughts or behaviors may have contributed to the death. Because children often have unrealistic views of themselves as being all-powerful and able to control situations or other people through wishes or rituals, they may feel they did not behave well enough or had unkind thoughts and therefore, “caused” the death.

If your child feels he is somehow responsible for the death, hear him out as he attempts to explain how his actions or thoughts contributed to the suicide. Listen without interrupting, and then gently go over his beliefs with him. This is a conversation you may need to have many times. Let him know that sometimes mental illnesses occur which change the chemistry of people’s brains. These illnesses can cloud a person’s judgment and cause them to feel hopeless and unable to improve their lives. Educate your child that brain illnesses, just like other severe illnesses such as heart disease or cancer, can cause some people to die. In many situations, people who have these serious medical conditions can get treatment and medicine that helps, but sometimes attempted remedies do not work.

It is important to help a child understand that no one lives a life without emotional pain. We all experience anxiety, sadness and conflict, but there are many ways to cope with life’s difficult times. We need to communicate to children that talking with others is a way of dealing with painful situations. Sharing our worries and concerns helps us feel better and may allow us to find a solution. Often, we learn that time changes our perspective or our situation.

Talking about suicide with our children is indeed difficult, but not impossible. Because every child is unique, each child’s response—emotional, cognitive, physical, behavioral and spiritual—will be different. Our task is to recognize each individual spirit and personality. We must give our children every opportunity to have their grief acknowledged, along with the encouragement to express their feelings. If we are willing to be patient, listen well and observe our children’s actions, they will teach us how best to support them.

Although talking to children about suicide is a formidable task, what we can offer them is the support and love they will need as they work toward coming to terms with their loss.

“If we are willing to be patient, listen well and observe our children’s actions, they will teach us how best to support them.”

Each time we start our sudden death learning series, we ask participants, “Why did you come? How can we help you?”

One response always surfaces. “I want to understand ‘why?’” A confirming look appears on the face of others in the group. I’m sure they came hoping Gary and I would be able to erase the nightmare events, gaze into a crystal ball, and assure them there is a reason to go on living. It is human nature to ask “Why?” and there is seldom a satisfactory answer.

Instead of answers, we give the bereaved “tools” to neutralize the reaction that death robbed them of someone very special and life ceases to have meaning. They are about to embark on an adventure and journey far beyond their imaginations. It’s an arduous task that will challenge a lifetime of beliefs and assumptions—a journey of self-discovery. In the search for meaning, there is a priceless gift offered in return for their suffering—an opportunity to pick up the pieces and start over again.

This experience will transform who they are and what they can become. During this transition, they have the potential to discover something even greater than the answer to their collective question. They can discover an inner spirit and an extraordinary courage to survive in a changed world. On their individual journeys, here are a few discoveries our group might find.

**Discover the Foundation of Your Core Beliefs**

We are raised with values and beliefs that influence who we are. We attribute these to our social culture, our religious backgrounds and our educational pursuits. We build a strong code of ethics that reflects our attitudes and our choices in life.

Seldom are these core beliefs severely challenged, but nothing challenges them more than the tragic death of a loved one. Our attitude towards what has happened has the potential to “make us or break us,” and our foundation of core beliefs may be the saving grace in times of crisis.

Gary and I can easily remember how dim the future appeared after the death of our son, Chad, at the age of twenty-one, as the result of suicide. Ten weeks later his fiancée took her life, too, perpetuating the anguish and pain we felt. Our religious belief system was temporarily challenged, because the world seemed unjust, and we held God responsible. We asked questions we knew others couldn’t answer, but we hoped that something would give us a reason to believe again. What we discovered (after our initial anger) was our religious foundation that became a guiding factor in acceptance and peace. Our core beliefs enabled us to search for meaning with the confidence and assurance that our quest was natural during grief.

When something bad happens in our lives, we may think that God doesn’t care or that he has abandoned us. Previously, days may have passed in which we thought little about God, until tragedy struck and we called out His name in anger or in plea for help. Then, we discovered that God was really there all the time. Searching for meaning helps us redirect our thoughts, sort out our feelings and search deeper to obtain comfort from age-old wisdom. For some, a religious foundation is the greatest source of help and hope.

**Discover “Why” in the Treasures of Life, Not the Tragedies**

When searching for “Why?” we often put aside our grieving to unravel a daunting mystery. Usually, a satisfactory answer for “Why?” doesn’t exist. With no suicidal background or theory about why Chad’s life ended so abruptly, we became exhausted with the search. My family assured me it was a mystery. Chad’s friends didn’t understand it. Some people just turned away. We were so immersed in trying to solve the mystery that we were forgetting the beautiful life of the person who died. When we finally put our tragedy aside, we celebrated the precious memories of who Chad was.

Soothe your uncertainty with memories and celebrate why your loved one was so special. Remember the person, not the perpetrator, and not the unexplainable event. Make a vow to honor your loved one’s memory through ritual and story. You can live with your memories, but you can’t live with your nightmares.

**Discover a New Perspective on What’s Really Important to You**

“Why?” causes us to reprioritize our commitments, our relationships and our values faster than any other question in life. We instantly realize that something we valued as very important is gone…and now we must adjust to living without.

As a result of grief, our priorities change to reflect what’s really important to us. Is your career and the number of hours at the office more important than having dinner or spending time with your family? Is living in the fast lane, indulging in rich food and spending large sums of money on luxuries more important than living a modest, healthy purposeful life? Maybe plans for an early retirement and travel suddenly seem essential.
Only you can make the choices, but it is likely as a result of grief, you will discover your priorities have changed. Adjusting our priorities helps us live in the moment, realizing that other moments may not exist.

**Discover an Acceptable Answer to Why—One You Can Live With**

Sometimes we don’t know or understand the full circumstances of the death—so we ask, “Why?” When answers are elusive, we begin to investigate all the possibilities. When there aren’t answers to satisfy us, or the answers are contradictory to perceive, we feel resentment. It’s reasonable at this point, to create our stories with plausible answers that help us to accept the tragedy.

First, explore your theory about why this death occurred in the manner or time it did. What do you believe happened? Why?

A reasonable explanation might be described as He or She:

- A) Made a mistake
- B) Was reckless or careless resulting in death
- C) Ignored health and medical cautions
- D) Acquired an incurable illness or disease
- E) Was aging and health declining
- F) Was in the wrong place at the wrong time
- G) Was the victim of a malicious crime

There is one more possibility that comforts some people. Their belief system supports the concept that “It was his or her time to die. God was calling our loved one home.”

Choose one of the probable causes (or add one of your own) and use it in your story about your loved one’s death. This allows you the comfort of telling your story and moving forward without being burdened by “Why?”

**Discover a Belief in Something Beyond**

In our search for meaning, “Why?” urges us to grasp for something less concrete—something “magical” and healing. Our innate spirituality allows us to stretch beyond our physical world and reach out for the unknown.

- A mother whose young daughter died tragically in an accident feels the presence of angels and a sense of security that her daughter is safe.
- A man has a vivid dream of his son who died and believes it was a “message” from beyond. This confirms his belief in the afterlife.
- A young woman whose husband died of kidney failure is comforted to know that he is in God’s care where there is no pain—and knows that he would want her to go on with her life.
- A wife indulges in mediation after her husband’s death. This helps her concentrate on her inner self, enhances her spirituality and gives her strength.

You can also develop a spiritual sensitivity through meditation, reading and re-building your self-esteem. This, in turn, helps you develop a personal philosophy of life and death. Religious roots can be strengthened by acquired spirituality. The two, working together, have the ability to heal the inner spirit.

**Discover that “Why” Isn’t Important Anymore**

Though you can’t change the situation, you can change yourself. Eventually, to heal your pain, it will be necessary to cease the pursuit of “Why?” and move forward in rebuilding your life.

Relentless pursuits of justice can take control of your life. One man was sure that destroying the animal that took his son’s life would be reasonable revenge for his son’s death. A couple felt that after a long, enduring trial, bringing a drunk driver to justice would soften the pain of their daughter’s untimely death. An irate mother tracked down the young men who had been with her son at the time of the car accident, and accused them (without fact) of irresponsible driving, use of alcoholic beverages and the presence of illegal drugs.

None of these actions solved the mystery of “Why?” Nor do they change what has occurred. These attempts to neutralize the pain are often futile. In the end—even if we accomplish what we set out to do—our loved ones still died. A wilted excuse from either a repentant person or one who feels no remorse will not heal the sorrow we cling to. Revengeful acts or lifelong pursuits of justice only destroy the moral character we value most. They may also result in destroying our own lives and the lives of loved ones.

When we seek to understand death, we become more comfortable with life. These discoveries transform the bereaved. For Gary and me, our search for meaning was a healing journey. Now I can live without the answer to “Why?” It doesn’t matter how the terrible event occurred. I remind myself that knowing “Why?” won’t change a thing. I have beautiful memories to sustain me through the tough times. My faith has given me a firm religious foundation. My spirituality comforts me in the quiet moments by knowing that “Chad is okay.” With my new perspective, I’m ready to face the possibilities of “what’s next?” And my intuitive self whispers, “If you really discovered the answer to ‘Why?’ would it bring Chad or Jenny back?”

Tuesday, May 14 Caring Connections hosted its annual Seeds of Remembrance program. Themed Forget-Me-Not, the event featured speakers Dave Buhler, State of Utah Commissioner for Higher Education, who spoke openly about how he copes with his son’s death to suicide.

Dave Buhler, the State of Utah Commissioner for Higher Education, spoke openly about coping with the death of his son to suicide.

Renowned poet Emma Lou Thayne recited “Thinking of You” and accomplished pianist Louise Degn provided the evening’s entertainment.

Support for Seeds of Remembrance is provided by the Clark L. Tanner Foundation in honor of Sarah Hogle, and by Larkin Mortuary.

Thinking of You
by Emma Lou Thayne

When the sunset is long,
When morning is far away,
I think of you and night is light.
Stars in my pillow quietly say:
Here is where you dwell in me.
I turn my memory inside out.
Then I discover the more and the much,
The radiant spell of you and touch.
You color my dreams at night,
Visit my days though out of sight.
This is forever how you appear.
I think of you and you are here.
When: Saturday, June 29, 2013 at 7:30 a.m.  
What: Race For Grief 2013 10K Run & 2 Mile Walk Benefitting Caring Connections and SHARE  
Where: West Bountiful Park  

The annual Race for Grief event includes a 10K run (6.2 miles) and 2 mile walk held at the West Bountiful Park (550 West Pages Lane), Utah. The race is put on in memory of Samantha. Participants are encouraged to participate in memory of someone. To learn more visit: www.RaceForGrief.com or www.BlondeRunner.com  

When: Wednesday, August 28, 2013  
What: 2013 Larkin Charity Golf Classic  
Where: Eaglewood Golf Course Benefitting Caring Connections  

Refer to the back cover of this edition of the Caring Connections newsletter for details about the event.

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The mission of Caring Connections is to provide excellent evidence-based bereavement care to grieving persons in the intermountain west through clinician facilitated support groups, with particular attention to the care of families served by the University of Utah Hospitals and Clinics; and, in keeping with the academic mission of the University and the College of Nursing, to provide opportunity for clinical education in grief and loss to students in the health care professions, and to conduct research which promotes greater understanding of loss, grief and bereavement.

Visit us online at www.nursing.utah.edu/caring-connections

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Remember Your Loved Ones—Caring Connections Memory Wall Order Form

Memory Wall (located in entry hallway to Caring Connections) 4” by 4” Tiles: $35.00

Male:  First Name ____________ Middle Initial _________ Last Name ________________________________  
       Birth Year ____________ Death Year ____________

Female: First Name ____________ Middle Initial _________ Last Name ________________________________  
       Birth Year ____________ Death Year ____________

Send checks and information to:  
Caring Connections: A Hope and Comfort in Grief Program  
University of Utah College of Nursing  
10 South 2000 East  
Salt Lake City, UT 84112-5880
Larkin Mortuary Invites You to Participate in the 2013 Larkin Charity Golf Classic Benefitting Caring Connections: A Hope and Comfort in Grief Program

Wednesday, August 28, 2013
Registration/Breakfast: 7:00 a.m. • Shotgun Start - Four Person Scramble: 8:00 AM
Eaglewood Golf Course • 1110 East Eaglewood Drive, North Salt Lake, UT 84054

Entry Fee: $150 for single players; $400 for foursome
Includes: breakfast, 18 holes with cart, lunch, raffle, tournament prizes
To register or learn more, contact: Steve Kehl • 801.664.3693 • skehl@larkincares.com
and Lehi Rodriguez • 801.809.1757 • Irodriguez@larkincares.com