

HOSPICE & HOME CARE OF JUNEAU

*Juneau, Alaska*

“In rural areas and isolated towns, hospices face unique obstacles. Hospice & Home Care of Juneau (HHCJ) is setting an example for finding creative ways to thrive.

Founded in 1979, HHCJ is a small agency of 20 employees and 50 volunteers that serves Juneau’s population of 31,000.

HHCJ is the only organization in Southeast Alaska that provides both hospice and home care services. This continuum has proved essential for helping patients make a smooth transition into hospice care. Because HHCJ becomes part of the medical team early on, information gathering, paperwork and pre-planning are streamlined.

“We emphasize empowering patients and their loved ones with information, choices and skilled support to help them cope with significant life transitions,” says Tammy Jablonski, executive director.

HHCJ’s biggest challenges will undoubtedly sound familiar to other small-town and rural organizations. HHCJ is Medicare-certified for home care only, because its hospice volume cannot justify the Medicare staffing minimums. But HHCJ has addressed its funding issues creatively. First, by blending home care and hospice, HHCJ can take advantage of available Medicare funding for comfort care. In addition, HHCJ has “gone public,” supplementing conventional charitable fundraising by taking its case to Juneau’s city government, which has responded with annual grants for HHCJ’s hospice efforts.

Capitalizing on the wide-ranging skills, backgrounds and personal interests of staff and volunteers, HHCJ



is exemplary in its acceptance of a broad spectrum of nontraditional faiths and spiritualities.

Until recently, however, HHCJ saw itself as one of Juneau’s best-kept secrets. In 1999, hoping to extend its outreach, HHCJ took a non-traditional step creating a 50-minute theater piece, called “Unexpected Gifts – Hospice: A Community Journey.” Sparked by an HHCJ social worker with a background in theater, the presentation builds on real-life interviews with local family members and hospice workers. “The stories reflect the wisdom, humor and grace of the dying and grief process, and show how we can support each other in time of need,” says Jablonski. “Each story offers a profound message, a poignant truth and an unexpected gift to share with the larger community.”

The impact of this endeavor has been much greater than HHCJ staff could have imagined. After its first local presentation, “Unexpected Gifts” gained wider exposure when it was professionally videotaped and aired statewide alongside a PBS four-part series entitled “Dying in America.”

Since then, HHCJ has begun work on a teacher’s guide to accompany the program. In addition, HHCJ has shared the script with other organizations and has developed a how-to model for others wanting to create their own.

HHCJ also offers semi-annual hospice volunteer training, bereavement support groups, special focus groups in schools, presentations to local businesses and organizations, and a comprehensive resource guide of community services. “Part of who we are is to act as a role model for other Alaska communities as they work to start their own hospices,” says Jablonski. “We also provide staff training and act as a sounding board for others as they grow and change.” With HHCJ’s assistance, volunteer hospices have been started in several other Southeast Alaska towns.

For others in small and rural communities, Jablonski offers encouraging words: “Your opportunities are limited only by your imagination and your staff’s willingness to participate. Even a small agency can have big dreams and accomplishments.”



INNOVATION HIGHLIGHTS

“UNEXPECTED GIFTS” THEATER-OUTREACH PRESENTATION

EXTENSIVE BEREAVEMENT FOCUS

SPECIAL ATTENTION TO SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OF A DIVERSE POPULATION

CREATIVE APPROACH TO FUNDING