

Butterfly Run Walk + Flutter run walk brings families together to honor kids who have died

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Walkers cross the finish line at a previous Butterfly Run, Walk + Flutter. This year's event is Sunday, Oct. 2, at Ned Brown/Busse Woods, Grove No. 26, Elk Grove Village. (courtesy of Missing Pieces)

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The death of a child, no matter their age or circumstances, leaves a gaping hole in a family.

Many families feel isolated in their grief, with no one to really tell how they are feeling in that moment -- or the days, months or years that follow.

Missing Pieces offers that community for families who have lost a child with outreach, resources, grief specialists and more.

"The death of a child is hard to imagine, and yet, it is a reality for more than 2,500 families each year in Illinois," said Kristin James of the Greater Illinois Pediatric Palliative Care Coalition, Missing Pieces and executive director of pediatrics at the HAP Foundation, in an email.

"Every child deserves to be remembered. Even after 25 years of supporting grieving families, I continue to learn from every parent's story, and I feel honored to hold the memories of their children.

"When the unimaginable does happen, we are here to ensure every family has the support they need as they navigate their grief journey."

One of the ways Missing Pieces honors children and their families is with the Butterfly Run Walk + Flutter.

This year's event takes place Sunday, Oct. 2, at Ned Brown/Busse Woods, Grove No. 26, Elk Grove Village. It begins at 9 a.m. with registration.

It features a 5K run, 1-mile walk and a Flutter Fun Run for Kids. Afterward, there will be a post-run party in the park with children's activities, entertainers, music and more.

Those who cannot attend can participate virtually now through Oct. 10.

This event does more than raise money, it offers a sense of community and support.

"I think it really gives us comfort, knowing that there are other families like ours out there," said Rose, a bereaved mother with Team XOXO.

Rachel French, director of Communications and Events, discusses Missing Pieces and the upcoming fundraiser.



A youngster sports butterfly wings while sitting on her dad's shoulders at a previous Butterfly Run, Walk + Flutter. The event is held for families to remember children who have died. - courtesy of Missing Pieces

Q: What is Missing Pieces and the HAP Foundation? Give a brief overview of what the organizations do.

A: Missing Pieces is a network of more than 70 organizations focused on supporting people after the loss of a child to find resources to navigate their grief journey.

Navigating grief and finding support can be complicated and isolating. Therefore, our network helps people find individualized, meaningful help. Our partners bring expertise in child loss by illness, trauma, homicide, overdose, and suicide, as well as serving families and children grieving perinatal through young adult deaths.

Whether your loss is recent, or your loss occurred some time ago, Missing Pieces grief navigators are here to help families find the resources they need and let them know they are not alone.

For more information, visit missingpiecesgrief.org (<http://missingpiecesgrief.org>).

- The HAP Foundation is an independent nonprofit that provides education, advocacy, workforce development, and research around hospice and palliative care for all ages.

With four decades rooted in direct patient care, it focuses on providing resources on serious illness and bereavement support; educating communities and health care professionals; and advancing policies that assist individuals and families managing end-of-life care for themselves or others.

A serious or terminal illness diagnosis can be filled with physical and emotional suffering for individuals and their loved ones. At The HAP Foundation, we believe everyone should have access to relief from pain and mental anguish through palliative and hospice care, which can provide support, dignity, and comfort in the days, weeks, even years before death; and support through their grief journey after.

For more information, visit thehapfoundation.org
(<http://thehapfoundation.org>).



Runners cross the finish line at a previous Butterfly Run, Walk + Flutter 5K. - courtesy of Missing Pieces

Q: Where do the majority of your donations come from?

A: For the Butterfly Run, families are encouraged to share their personal stories and invite their friends and colleagues to join their team. We are also grateful for

the generosity of our corporate partners who support the event to help create a community for bereaved families.

Q: How many people per year do you serve?

A: Through Missing Pieces, more than 1,300 grieving families have been assisted with support from over 70 organizations.

Q: What are some of your programs?

A: Missing Pieces prioritizes access to resources and education by providing a centralized hub for support following child loss through direct outreach to families, professional networking for grief specialists, and community presentations.



A Butterfly Run, Walk + Flutter participant and her dog at a previous event. This year's event is Sunday, Oct. 2. - courtesy of Missing Pieces

Q: Tell us about the Butterfly Run Walk + Flutter.

A: The Butterfly Run, Walk + Flutter is a fun, family-oriented, special event for individuals of all fitness levels who want to be part of celebrating the memory of children who have died.

Through moments of silence to reflect and a bubble send-off to whisper messages to the children, the Butterfly Run, Walk + Flutter is a place of shared experience for families with a common bond.

There is an understanding, a space of healing and, most importantly, joy and laughter at the gathering. Families are invited to join together whether it has been two weeks since their child's death or more than 10 years, to celebrate and honor their children.

Our team brings support for infant or child loss by illness, trauma, homicide, overdose and suicide, as well as serving families and children grieving perinatal through young adult deaths.

At the Butterfly Run, Walk + Flutter, we walk for our children and their memories. We walk together to support seriously ill children and grieving families.

This year's event takes place Sunday, Oct. 2, at Ned Brown/Busse Woods, Grove No. 26, Elk Grove Village.

The event schedule:

- 9-10 a.m. -- registration
- 9 a.m. to noon -- KidZone family activities
- 10 a.m. -- 5K Certified Race
- 10:15 a.m. 1 Mile Walk
- 11:30 a.m. Flutter Fun Run for Kids

Cost is \$30 for the 5K run and 1 mile walk; \$5 for the Flutter Fun Run for Kids; \$100 for a family of 4 or more; \$30 for the virtual event, which runs now through Oct. 10.

Register at butterflyrunillinois.org (<http://butterflyrunillinois.org>).



There are various activities for kids after the Butterfly Run, Walk + Flutter event, including entertainers, music and more. - courtesy of Missing Pieces

Q: How can people participate?

A: The event features a professionally chip-timed 5K run, 1 mile walk, and a Flutter Fun Run for kids of all ages. Families are encouraged to enjoy the run as a team in honor of their child.

The party in the park will include children's activities, entertainers, music, and opportunities to connect with health care teams and other families. Parents and families can visit the craft section to create mile markers with their children's names, or decorate frames for their favorite picture of their child.

Register at butterflyrunillinois.org.

Q: How can readers help if they can't participate in the event?

A: If you are unable to join us on Oct. 2, participate virtually and gather your friends to complete your 1-mile walk or 5K on your own time. If you prefer solitude, take this opportunity to reflect and remember your loved one during a solo walk/run. Register at butterflyrunillinois.org.

Q: What else would you like readers to know?

A: In addition to The HAP Foundation and Missing Pieces, The Butterfly Run, Walk + Flutter is also hosted by the Greater Illinois Pediatric Palliative Care Coalition.

The coalition is comprised of hospital systems, hospices, families and supporting organizations dedicated to optimizing the quality of life for every child in Illinois living with a serious illness, their families and the teams that care for them.

Over 2,800 children in Illinois currently live with a serious illness. Less than 1% of children who could benefit from pediatric palliative or hospice care receive it.

Through our work, we aim to help every child live their best life and support families in their emotional journey from diagnosis through treatment and as they navigate their grief journey.

This group impacts change through collaboration, education, advocacy, research, and support to raise awareness about the unique needs of seriously ill children. While we cannot change a prognosis, we can change how we care for our most seriously ill children.

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Butterfly Run Walk + Flutter

What: Run/walk for families to remember children who have died, sponsored by the HAP Foundation, Missing Pieces and the Greater Illinois Pediatric Palliative Care Coalition.

When: Sunday, Oct. 2; registration begins at 9 a.m.

Where: Ned Brown/Busse Woods, Grove No. 26, Elk Grove Village

Cost: \$30 for the 5K run and 1 mile walk; \$5 for the Flutter Fun Run for Kids; \$100 for a family of 4 or more; \$30 for the virtual event, which runs now through Oct. 10.

Register: butterflyrunillinois.org (<http://butterflyrunillinois.org>)

\$1 for 4 Weeks

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