

A Call for Change: Navigating Loss and Healing in the Complex Journey of Grief in Developmental Services

In Memory of a Supported Individual
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Author Information

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A Cry Within the Cracks of a Broken System

“I would like to go to Ottawa”, she stated,
“To see the museum, parliament and gardens”, oh how she waited.
A head full of dreams and a heart full of pain,
She tried to stay strong, but her past left a stain.

She said “in Ottawa, we could walk down by the river”,
“What about those frigid winters, we would shiver!”
“But how fun would it be to escape,”
“I need this dream to take shape!”

Death comes to us all, the undeniable truth,
But she was young, filled with life and youth.
“The system failed her”, we continue to state in vain,
Could we have done more to ease her pain?

We now gather with grief and shame,
She is here no more, who is to be blamed?
We are all cogs in a wheel, feeling responsible for her death,
An unlived dream, she was alone when she took her last breath.

Her life characterized by diagnoses and limiting labels,
We were warned, “staff, she is unstable and keeps spinning fables!”
“She has her own apartment and takes her own decisions”, how inclusive,
But when care and support are replaced by isolation, that’s abusive.

A system that was built to protect, now broken,
Listen to our voices they have long been unspoken.
If you want change, come walk on our floors,
See what it means to be doing so much more.

Developmental services, a network of care so frayed,
Hearing the crying and anguished voices of the individuals are delayed.
Neglect in this field, not by intention but by design,
But her trusted support workers you might ask? oh wait, they’ve resigned.

High turnover or “abandonment” she called it, leaves the individuals empty,
The hearts in this work are less and the clients are a-plenty.
Our compassion lost in paperwork and time,
Their lives reduced to checklists, chores and calendars, a real crime.

But we give so much and hardly receive,
Our love grows thin with no time to grieve.
Like an uninvited guest, burnout knocks on our door,
When our passion is destroyed at its core.

Let this not be a tragic tale,
But rather a time we lifted the veil.
If we fail one, we have failed them all,

The individuals' health and well-being must never fall.

We are the backbone of this system,
We refuse to have more victims,
We plead for better policy, training and pay,
Giving rise to leaders who must change the way.

Let us fight for justice, grounded in care,
To all DSPs, this is the story I share.
We owe the individuals more than empty promises or plans,
We owe them a system built by our hearts and hands.