

# The Kohn Family Story

Jessica Kohn first learned about Ele's Place when her employer, Fifth Third Bank, sponsored the annual Healing Hearts Society breakfast in 2016. She was touched by the stories of Ele's Place families, and how the staff helped them through their darkest days. She could see how special Ele's Place was and the impact that was being made on so many lives. This encouraged Jessica to make a gift at the breakfast to support the mission of healing. Jessica could not have known at that time that she and her family would become far more acquainted with the services provided by Ele's Place. This time, not as a donor or a partner, but as a recipient family bringing her two daughters to Ele's Place grief support programming.

Shortly following her attendance at her first breakfast event, Jessica and her husband Scott received heartbreaking news; their oldest daughter, Macayla Lee Kohn had been killed in a car accident on a sunny October afternoon in 2016. A junior in high school with a beautiful smile and a personality that lit up any room, she was her way to attend team bonding with her volleyball team. Macayla never made back to school to share the evening with her friends, and the life of her parents and two younger sisters, Madison and Marisa, were changed forever.

"Macayla was a gifted athlete that played multiple sports including soccer when she was little, along with volleyball, basketball, and softball throughout her school years. It was obvious at a young age that she had the drive and desire to be better, get better, and help others do the same." Jessica shared. "But, we will always remember her as a loving daughter, granddaughter, sister, friend, teammate, and classmate who always brought an energy with her that made everyone feel important, included, and longing to be part of the fun in whatever they were doing."

As the Kohns began their journey of living without Macayla, many feelings emerged that ranged from guilt to thankfulness, from uncertainty to hope, from disbelief and denial to reality. Every member of the family was traveling their grief path in their own way. Jessica and Scott knew that three things would help sustain their family as they processed Macayla's death: their faith, their family & friends, and their community, including the support of community resources like Ele's Place.



In seeking support from their community, Jessica and Scott thought Ele's Place, as an organization serving children and teens specifically, would be a great option. It was here their daughters (and Scott and Jessica, too) were able to relate to others who had a common experience to theirs, and to help the girls learn that no matter what they were feeling, those feelings were okay. For Madison, who was quite open with her feelings about her sister's death, but also for Marisa too, who really didn't show much emotion in her grief. The latter of course worried the Kohns, but through the attendance in their own adult group, they were also able to understand that all feelings and reactions to grief and Macayla's death were normal.

Both girls were hesitant to attend program at Ele's Place, however, Marisa, the youngest, quickly connected with the staff and other kids that attended and after the first night asked when they would go back. Maddie on the other hand found that she was better suited to work on her grief through Art and sharing her feelings with her friends and family. Scott found that he enjoyed sharing and speaking with other parents and grandparents of these kids while they were in their own groups, while Jessica grieved more like Maddie and found her solace in sharing her feelings with others through writing.

As Jessica stated, "That is the great thing about Ele's Place. They recognize that everyone has their own grief journey and what works for one individual may not work for others." Jessica, Scott, Madison and Marisa, with the support of Ele's Place, and those around them who also loved Macayla, have been able to continue this journey through the most difficult experience of their lives. "I would have never thought, when I first donated to Ele's Place, that I would ever need these services. I continue to feel gratitude for others who also shared their generous spirit with Ele's Place, so they can continue to help families like mine."



# Capital Region

## A Letter from Kristine Kuhnert



Dear Friends of Ele's Place,

From November through January, we are surrounded by family, festive lights, gifts, cheerful music, traditions and laughter. If you are grieving, the holiday season is frequently the toughest time to navigate. How can you celebrate and be joyful when your heart misses someone you care about? Traditions may change. A song may trigger a memory. When the table is set, it is glaringly apparent someone is missing.

Ele's Place has served the Lansing area since 1991. Our peer to peer support programs are provided 4 nights a week here at Ele's Place. In addition, we are in more than 35 schools, providing an eight-week grief support program for teens who cannot make it to Ele's Place.

In Ele's Place bereavement support groups, the children and teens answer each other's questions. "Who will buy my dad a Christmas present?" "My dad always bought my mom flowers for Mother's Day; who will do that now?" "Am I still a big sister?" "Is it okay to ask for a birthday party this year?" In group, children and teens discuss the challenging questions as they are surrounded by peers who understand what they are struggling with. Their friends at school don't understand these tough questions. Group members talk about these raw issues and provide support as well as suggestions to navigate the array of emotions that arise throughout the year. At Ele's Place, they can reflect on the past and work toward finding new traditions and finding peace.

All of these services are provided at no-cost to the families. Often families have lost the income of a spouse or may have tremendous medical bills. Because of you, all a grieving family has to do is call to receive services. There is no worry about how they will pay for grief support for their family. In 2018, 83 cents of every dollar went to support our program, keeping our administrative costs well below the industry standard. We are able to do this while spending a little more than \$500 per child per year and \$2500 to support one school group. We receive no government funding, and we do not bill insurance. We can provide this important service because of your generous support. As you consider your year-end giving, we hope you will consider Ele's Place.

On behalf of our Board of Directors, volunteers and staff thank you for believing in the importance of our mission. Grief is the price of love. Where there is intense grief, there is intense love.

