

Footprints

by [Gene Davis](#)

April 30, 2014



Photo by Gene Davis

From left: Kent Brenneman, Laurence Terrell, Rich Thompson and Jim Ruth are organizers for Footprints.

Local program assists grieving children

Based around the motto of "You Are Not Alone," Footprints, a Round Rock–based program, aims to help children in times of grief.

After filing for nonprofit status April 25, Footprints founder Laurence Terrell said he hopes the program will soon expand its reach and help more children who are experiencing a crisis in their life.

"We know there is a need, and we want to step up to fill it," he said.

Footprints started in 2011 as a First United Methodist Church–affiliated outreach effort. Footprints advisor Rich Thompson said it quickly became clear that the program needed to serve the entire community and not just one church.

Terrell said achieving nonprofit status would allow Footprints to reach a broader community. Terrell and the other Footprints volunteers are considering holding sessions in locations in addition to FUMC Round Rock.

“We started off slow because we didn’t want to take [Footprints] as fast as it could have gone until we are totally ready,” Terrell said.

Today Footprints utilizes a team of 31 trained volunteers to support its programs. A Footprints session consists of 10 weekly classes. The classes feature structured hands-on activities designed to help a grieving child work through his or her emotions, Terrell said.

“Sometimes they won’t understand why they are mad or afraid or scared or understand that it’s okay to be scared or angry at times,” Footprints Vice President of Marketing Kent Brenneman said. “The question is how do you deal with those emotions, and some of the activities we use give them a chance to express that anger in a positive way.”

While many of Footprints’ activities were developed by mental health professionals and licensed professional counselors, Terrell stressed that Footprints does not provide counseling or therapy services. The organization is more akin to a vacation Bible school format, he said.

Footprints also holds orientation sessions for parents that explain what children will be doing in the class. The orientation also lays out the basic philosophy of Footprints. While Footprints is a Christian program, Terrell said the sessions don’t evangelize and are open to all.

“The children find out through sessions, without someone saying it, that they are not alone,” Footprints Vice President of Promotions Jim Ruth said. “There are others out there that feel the same thing. That will never take the pain away, but it can help them deal with it.”

Volunteers

All 31 of Footprints’ volunteers have completed background checks, founder Laurence Terrell said. The trained volunteers include two school principals and a licensed professional counselor. Volunteers lead sessions and facilitate the program’s various activities.

Jim Ruth, Footprints vice president of promotions, said he was drawn by the program’s mission.

“When I went to a training [session], a light bulb went off,” he said. “I could see how [this program] could work and the importance of it. [Volunteering] was a no-brainer.”

Rays of Hope

Founder Laurence Terrell said his visit to Midland-based Rays of Hope, a community outreach program that works with children ages 4–18 who have experienced a traumatic loss, inspired him to help start Footprints.

“The good work they were doing was incredible,” Terrell said. “I knew there was a need for this [in Round Rock.]”

Footprints also uses curriculum from Camp Agape, an Austin summer camp designed for children who have suffered the loss of a loved one.

Introductory interview

Before a child is enrolled, Footprints holds interviews with the child’s parent or guardian.

If a child needs counseling to deal with issues, Footprints refers them to the appropriate resources, Footprints Vice President of Promotions Kent Brenneman said.

Footprints founder Laurence Terrell said the Christian program should be used as more of a peer support group than a therapy session.

402A W. Palm Valley Blvd., Ste. 335, 512-705-5194, www.footprintschildrensministry.org