

# Digital memories help youth deal with death

BY ADAM MC LEAN

Discussing the agony of losing a loved one is painful for anyone, but a local hospice is hoping a high-tech approach makes the process easier.

Evergreen Hospice, which serves Whitchurch-Stouffville and Markham, is aiming its digital memories program at youths, but all ages are welcome to check it out.

"Most kids come because it is a non-talking group," bereavement counsellor Shafana Dhanani said.

"They don't want to talk about their grief because it is too difficult, so the Digital Memories program offers them a way to express themselves through art, pictures or a DVD."

Participants are given access to computers, video equipment, photo scanners and cameras in order to create a digital scrapbook.

Projects often feature home video footage, slide shows set to music and family members being interviewed by the participant, who asks them to recall memories of the deceased.

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Participants act as director, producer and editor. They have creative control which, according to Ms Dhanani, surprises them at first, but helps them express themselves without being coaxed.

"I made a DVD of my dad. It was fun," said Andrew, 13, who participated in digital memories last summer after his father died.

"I did some interviews with my family members asking them what they thought of my dad and what kind of person they thought he was."

Andrew's family credits the project with not only helping him deal with the loss, but helping the family.

"We were afraid to bring up the topic with him and for a long time he wouldn't talk about it," his Aunt Kim said. "The program gave us a good opportunity to

exchange how we feel."

Ms Dhanani visits schools throughout York Region offering the program to teenagers who have lost a loved one.

"We are always looking for kids to participate. They are usually reluctant and afraid of disclosing more than they are able to," she said.

"In many cases, teens can be grief-isolated and they feel no one understands them, but this is a safe environment to be expressive with people the same age, grieving a similar loss."

The next workshop runs this month and next, so projects are complete in time for the holidays.

The group meets from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Wednesdays at the hospice, 6060 Hwy. 7, just east of Hwy. 48.

The program is free and there are still openings.



PHOTO/ADAM MC LEAN

While the Digital Memories program is aimed at teenagers, anyone can use it, said Shafana Dhanani of Evergreen Hospice, which serves Whitchurch-Stouffville.

For more information, inquire at [info@evergreen](mailto:info@evergreen)

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