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Fenway Park benefit celebrates fifth year

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Cyndi Jones of Wellesley knows all too well how the death of a parent can emotionally devastate a family and put grieving children at risk. Twenty years ago, her husband died suddenly of a heart attack, leaving Jones to care for their three children - 3 months, and 5 and 8 years old.

In the difficult years that followed, though, one thing helped her and her children immensely, Jones said, and the nonprofit organization she founded is working to offer that same support to others.

Wildflower Camp Foundation, which celebrates its fifth year with a gala fund-raiser at Fenway Park on Saturday, provides summer camp scholarships to Greater Boston children and teens grieving the death of a parent.

“For these kids, it’s a time, for a moment, where the burden of the trauma that has come upon their family is removed somewhat - so that there’s more room to feel carefree, to feel a little lighter, to really be a kid and just have a normal summer swimming, playing, and running,” she said.

“Obviously, the grief is still there,” added Jones, who is a psychotherapist and personal coach with a specialty in bereavement. “But grief is a combination of mourning for the person that we’ve lost but also figuring out how to move forward, and this experience of camp gives children that other side. It’s a chance to see that life could become good again at some point.”

For overburdened, bereaved parents, day or overnight camp for their children offers a chance to mourn, regroup, or simply rest. They



New friends gather around a Wildflower Camp Foundation participant supported by the Wellesley-based nonprofit.

can also take comfort knowing their children are in a constructive, safe place while they are at work.

“The impact is on the family as a whole. It’s not only for the child,” said Jones, whose own family benefited from camp scholarships over a period of years. But her concern is greatest for the children whom Wildflower serves.

“Children who have lost a parent are at risk. They are at risk psychologically. They are at risk in many other ways,” said Jones.

“Life has changed quite dramatically, and for some families very dramatically. They’re needing to sell houses and move to new towns and school districts. It’s not just the loss but the turmoil that follows that puts these kids at risk, and camp provides them with a safe place for the summer where they can direct their energy into new and positive things.”

In five years, the number of youths served by Wildflower each summer has grown fivefold, to nearly 30. Save for one paid staffer who works four hours per week, the effort is entirely volunteer, run by Jones and more than 50 professionals, including camp advisors and therapists who carefully assess each family's situation. Donations have also grown, but the organization still cannot keep up with the need.

"This is actually the first year that we've had to turn families away. That's why this fund-raiser, and fund-raising in general, is so important to us at this point in time," said Jones.

Sportscaster Bob Lobel will host Saturday's event, "The Promise of Summer at Fenway Park." It will include private tours of the ballpark, hors d'oeuvres, dinner, dancing, music, and a silent auction for Celtics and Red Sox tickets, tickets to "The Late Show with David

Letterman," and other theater, concert, and restaurant gift certificates.

"In today's culture, where everything moves so quickly, someone has a loss and it's everyone's focus for the moment. But a year later, the family is still reeling and people don't understand that it goes on in year two, three, four, and five, too, that the burden still exists," said Jones.

"That's why Wildflower works with a family as long as the need exists, but we also want to take on new families every year, which is why we hope to expand our base of support."

"The Promise of Summer at Fenway Park" will be held 6 to 10 p.m. Saturday at the EMC Club at Fenway Park, 4 Yawkey Way, Boston. Festive attire. \$125, \$135 with tour. Tickets and info at www.wildflowercampfoundation.org/fenway.htm. ■

Online at:

http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2009/09/24/fenway_gala_will_benefit_camp_foundation_for_bereaved_children/