

A Brief History of Share of Lancaster, Inc.

Share [originally SHARE] of Lancaster, Inc. was founded in in 1981 and grew out of the experience of Kathy Kuhn, a mother whose 9 lb., 3 oz. daughter, Mary, was stillborn at Hershey Medical Center in 1980. Kathy was one of the first patients at that hospital to have the opportunity to hold her stillborn infant. When she talked to parents in Lancaster she realized how fortunate she had been. One parent told her how she never had an opportunity to see her baby, and that her 10 lb. stillborn daughter had been incinerated, because that was the standard procedure at the time. Parents were often given no choices in the matter, except disposal of the body in some cases. Many health care professionals at the time were ignorant regarding the natural grieving process that parents undergo at the time of a such a loss and hospital protocols focused on what was perceived to be “best for the patient” - often inadvertently fostering denial and complicating grief for the parents.

Convinced that she had benefited from having a more active role in her own bereavement experience, Kathy contacted Sister Jane Marie Lamb, founder of a group called SHARE (a Source of Help in Airing and Resolving Experiences) in Springfield, Illinois. The Illinois SHARE group had begun in 1977 and was established to provide an opportunity for parents who had experienced the death of a baby to gain comfort and mutual reassurance from sharing their experiences with one another and to promote adequate professional response to their bereavement needs. Kathy, along with several nurses and a hospital chaplain, set out to start a similar group in Lancaster. They contacted local doctors, nurses, mental health professionals and funeral directors to establish a base of community support. The first public meeting of Share of Lancaster, Inc. was held on March 2, 1981—and our organization joined forces with what was to become a national and international SHARE movement. The National Share Office moved to St. Charles, Missouri in 1991 and the vision of a few has become the vision of many. As a local affiliate of the National Share Office, Share pays annual dues that grant us the right to use the Share logo and name. National Share also expects a portion of any funds raised by our affiliate and requires our group leaders to maintain a minimum 3 hours of continuing education every two years. Information on National Share may be found at www.nationalshareoffice.com.

Share then set about providing much-needed services in the Lancaster community. These included: the education of local hospital personnel regarding more sensitive protocols for handling the death of baby; the establishment of the no-cost Share Burial program; a 24 – hour answering service to provide parents with information and support; and the beginning of support groups for family members who have experienced the death of a baby. Share’s services have also included at various times—a newsletter, a lending library of educational and supportive resources for parents, provision of educational pamphlets for parents and staff, and a blanket project where volunteers sew special presentation blankets for babies who have died. Individual members of Share have

contributed many hours of their time in efforts to education the community and health care professionals through programs at local hospitals and through the media. Share established the Annual Walk to Remember in 2003—an event for families to come together and share their grief in a supportive environment.

Like every small, non-profit organization, Share of Lancaster has had its peaks and its valleys in terms of financial health and volunteer support. However, since its landmark 25th anniversary celebration, Share of Lancaster has undergone a significant renewal of leadership and energy which is leading the way for a bright future of continuing in our vital work for the grieving families of Lancaster.