

## **Calm Waters to Provide Grief Support Groups for Incarcerated Oklahomans at OK County Jail**

**OKLAHOMA CITY, OK, October 12, 2022** – Calm Waters Center for Children and Families, the only grief center in Oklahoma City offering free grief support services to the entire family, is launching a new program in partnership with the Oklahoma County Detention Center to provide FREE grief support groups and workshops to detainees at the Oklahoma County Jail. The program will include grief workshops and weekly support groups for incarcerated men and women.

Calm Waters has served as Oklahoma City's grief experts for 30 years. When Erin Engelke, Calm Waters Executive Director, was asked to serve on the Criminal Justice Authority Citizens Advisory Board at the OK County Jail, she received a front-row perspective on the severe lack of mental health resources for the individuals detained at the facility. Jail Program Coordinator Mac Mullings estimates that three-fourths of the jail's 1,600 detainees suffer from some kind of mental health issues.

"Grief lives in this building," Mullings said.

After seeing this extreme need, Engelke, Mullings, and Calm Waters Program Director Hannah Showalter, LMSW, created a grief support program to serve incarcerated individuals. By providing free grief support groups to 40 total participants, and grief workshops to 160 attendees, an estimated 200 total individuals will be served in one series, and 400 will be served in one year.

"While the OK County Jail detainees may come from vastly different cultural, religious, and economic backgrounds, there is likely one common thread that binds them together: trauma, and unfortunately that grief and trauma has led to problematic choices," said Engelke. "As central Oklahoma's only grief center, we are truly honored to be able to expand our programming to provide desperately needed mental health support services to men and women who are incarcerated."

Beginning January 2023, Grief Support Groups will meet once weekly for a nine-week series. Each group will be comprised of no more than ten individuals to promote emotional safety within the space. There will be four groups total offered in the first series, two groups for men and two for women. There is no cost for participants to register for the grief support groups.

All detainees are welcome to register, there are no qualifiers on the type of grief they are experiencing. Direct conversations with detainees discussed types of grief including death, relationship loss, child separation, loss of freedom and more of the traumas felt by the vast majority of the facility population.

Groups will be facilitated by previously incarcerated individuals, recruited through a partnership with TEEM. These contracted positions will be an income opportunity for individuals who have served time in jail. Furthermore, having a facilitator who has experienced the participants are sitting will create immediate trust in the support group, a vital factor for effective grief support service.

Grief Workshops will be provided biannually. First, Calm Waters will provide a "Grief through the Holidays" workshop, serving detainees who are struggling to get through the holidays while incarcerated.

All curriculum for grief support groups and grief workshops has been created specifically to serve those at the Oklahoma County Jail. Calm Waters staff modeled the new curriculum off the existing Calm Waters grief curriculum, which has been successfully serving clients for 30 years, but carefully adapted to address the many types of grief, frustration and limited autonomy in the jail.

“As administrators of the Jail, we recognize many of our detainees are dealing with a wide variety of mental health struggles, including dealing with grief,” said Greg Williams, Oklahoma County Detention Center CEO. “As much as possible, we provide services to help people while they are in our custody. We appreciate partners like Calm Waters who are willing to step up and care for those in need. With their help, we can create a safer, more secure facility for our community.”

Funding for Incarcerated Oklahomans Grief Support Groups was provided by United Way of Central Oklahoma, through the WayFinder Innovation Grant.

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### **About Calm Waters Center for Children and Families**

Calm Waters Center for Children and Families provides FREE grief support services for children and families on their grief journey caused by death, divorce or other significant loss. Since beginning in 1992, Calm Waters has served more than 59,000 individuals across the Greater OKC Metro Area through their Center and School Support Groups. For more information about Calm Waters and their services, visit [Calmwaters.org](http://Calmwaters.org) or call 405-841-4800. Calm Waters is a proud United Way of Central Oklahoma Partner Agency.