

Ann Arbor Observer

Wednesday November 14, 2018

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ARBOR VIEW



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Photo © Monica Brancheau

Ele's (New) Place

A new building means no more waiting lists for grieving kids.

by Dawn Wolfe

From the August, 2018 issue

On a recent July morning, Ele's Place Ann Arbor broke ground on a dream that's been a long time coming: a permanent location. After meeting at various churches for the last decade, young people who've lost someone they loved will have the security of a home-like setting with a library, rooms for potlucks and peer support groups, and even a "loud activity" room where they can let off steam.

Founded in Lansing in 1991, Ele's Place expanded to Ann Arbor in 2007. Everyone involved is grateful to the churches that have made room for their young clients over the years. They were also clear that it was time for the roughly 100 families Ele's Place serves each week to have a home of their own.

The 15,000-square-foot building is expected to be completed by next June. "I think the biggest benefit of having our own building will be to eliminate the wait list," says Matt Jakubik, whose wife, Beth, is vice-chair of the Ann Arbor board.

After the Jakubiks' three-year-old daughter, Phoebe, died in a drowning accident in 2008, they brought her older sister and brother to Ele's Place. "When families are in need of this service, it can take courage to reach out and admit you need the help," Matt says. "And to find out there's a one-month, a three-month waiting list? It can be very disheartening."

According to an Ele's Place handout, at any given time, thirty children are waiting for an opening in one of its free support groups. And churches aren't necessarily set up for large groups of kids or for privacy.

Ele's Place Ann Arbor managing director Monica Brancheau recalls the situation when Susan Torrible Spoor, widowed when her U-M physician husband Martin Spoor was killed in a Survival Flight accident in 2007, began bringing her children to Ele's Place meetings at a church. One child was reluctant to leave her mother's side and join her siblings in the support group.

...continued below...

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The church didn't have a lounge, so Torrible Spoor spent two hours every week in a hallway with her daughter.

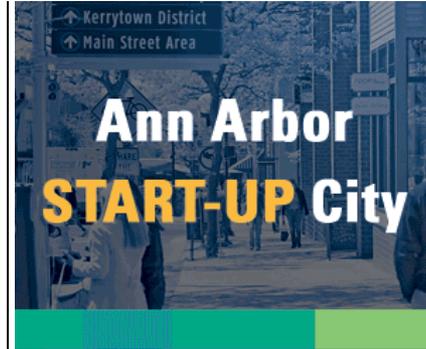
In the new building, says Brancheau, "when we have kids who aren't ready to attend like their siblings, they'll be able to come with their parent and have a comfortable, beautiful space with comfy furniture, books, and a fireplace—a place where they can begin healing rather than sitting on the floor in a hallway." The building's library will be named after Martin Spoor.

By the time of the groundbreaking, a capital campaign led by Jiffy Mix's Howdy Holmes and Michigan first lady Sue Snyder had raised \$5.9 million of its \$7.9 million goal. The Buhr Foundation is currently offering a matching grant of up to \$75,000 toward the \$2 million balance.

[Originally published in August, 2018.]

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