

PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE APPLICATION

2019

CALDWELL & COWAN FUNERAL HOME

CATEGORY 1 – BASIC REQUIREMENTS

Criteria I – Essay

Caldwell & Cowan Funeral Home has maintained an open-to-the-public Lending Library for many years. When we moved to our Access Road location, the Library remained at our Floyd Street location due to the fact that our support groups met there, and it was believed that they would benefit most from Library access. The Library was still available to the public, as well. We eventually realized that the library was not being utilized to the extent we felt was possible, and a couple of years ago we relocated everything to our Access Road location.

After the move, it became obvious that the Library needed an update in several ways, and a more visible presence, so we closed for a few months and took that time to do a complete redecoration. A small room located off the public hospitality room was repurposed and became a library and reading room, with comfortable seating and bookcases with books displayed by category. When redecoration was finally completed, we began looking toward the “official reopening” of the Library.

As a celebration of the Grand Opening of our new Grief Lending Library on May 5, 2019, we held a community outreach event called “It’s Story Time” which was geared toward children. This event was envisioned by our Funeral Director/Embalmer Christine Banks. Christine took the idea from inception through completion, and with the help of other staff members, created our first “It’s Story Time” event. Here’s the story behind “It’s Story Time”.

The idea for “It’s Story Time” was developed out of a desire to invite family bonding into the funeral home facility. Most specifically, it was to take place at the location of our Grief Lending Library, which was established to provide comfort and information to families in need of support and was being reopened at that time.

We felt that basing a family experience on the youngest members of the families, the children, added lightness to the experience. Previous experiences at the funeral home may have all been heavy and emotionally draining, and we wanted to change that. Our program is meant to show that Caldwell & Cowan Funeral Home can be a place of togetherness and learning during happy times, too. This time can also put children at ease when visiting our location by teaching them that the funeral home is not a scary or sad place to be.

In preparation for “It’s Story Time” we took the time as a staff to review many children’s books and chose one that focused on teaching empathy and understanding. The story chosen was *I Am Human*, by Susan Verde.

There were bookmarks made with the Caldwell & Cowan logo which were placed in gift bags along with crayons, pencils, erasers, and candy for the children to take home. The hospitality room and the back

lobby area just outside it were set up with a reading area, coloring area, and snack area for the visitors to utilize. The Library was open with new books on display. The program time was one hour, from 3:00-4:00pm, and began with Christine reading the story, then snacks and drinks, followed by coloring time on pre-printed coloring pages.

The program was promoted a month prior to the event on various platforms. A flyer for "It's Story Time" was placed on bulletin boards at local churches and handed out at our own Support Group meetings. A Facebook Event was created by the funeral home and shared by the employees for the public to see. Anyone who was interested in participating was encouraged to RSVP so that we would be aware of the number of people to expect and the amount of refreshments to prepare.

We feel that this event provided an avenue for our staff to present the funeral home in a different light. By participating in future story time events, they can introduce their own families to the families that we serve and can bond in our shared love of teaching future generations. Families can learn to find comfort within the walls of the funeral home and leave with a sense that they can reach out to our staff when they are in need of support through grief counseling, utilizing our Library, or putting their future stress at ease through pre-planning.

We are committed to the future of this program and have already begun planning for our next "It's Story Time" event.