

TRIB LIVE

Exploring grief through drumming in New Kensington



[EMILY BALSER](#) | Saturday, Oct. 14, 2017, 12:27 a.m.

If you go

What: New Kensington Drumming Circle

Where: Heritage Hospice, 2400 Leechburg Road, building 300, New Kensington

When: 6-7:30 p.m., the second Thursday of every month

Cost: Free; drums are provided

For details or to confirm class times, call 724-334-6600



It started with one stroke on a drum.

Then another joined in.

Then a tap of a red shoe and a nod of a head with the beat.

It isn't a band or a group of professionals getting ready for a performance, but instead a group of strangers who are looking for a way to grieve and release stress through music.

A new drumming circle class offered the second Thursday of every month by Heritage Hospice in New Kensington provides an alternative to traditional grief therapy or counseling. The first class was held Thursday.

“We're looking at alternative ways of being able to meet people as they go through the grief process,” said Cynthia Kinney, bereavement counselor. “Sometimes it is very difficult for them to talk about things. But through the arts and music, it is an avenue for them to, in a sense, open their hearts.”

The class is led by a music therapy intern, Ashley Taylor, who prompts participants to think of a certain experience or feeling before starting to play. They can choose to talk about how they are feeling at the end, or not.

There are no rules — only feelings and reflection.

“The cool thing about a drum circle is you can experiment,” Taylor said.

Frank Nemeth from Avonmore has been drumming for 15 years as a way to relieve stress. “I find that it's one of the best ways to relieve negative emotions,” he said.

Nemeth said he isn't grieving but still got a lot from the first class and meeting the other participants.

“There was a sense of unity,” he said. “We locked in really quickly.”

Tami Kelly, director of operations for Heritage Hospice, said the company wants to offer more grief counseling options locally so families don't have to travel to Pittsburgh or other areas that are far away.

“The community has had so much loss,” she said.

New Kensington resident Angela Shearon said she has lost several loved ones over the last three years, including her husband.

“I think it was relaxing,” she said. “You kind of make it what you want.”

Shearon had never participated in a drumming circle before.

“I think it's different, and people could benefit from it,” she said.

Taylor said she didn't anticipate the cohesiveness of the first class.

“I was really surprised at how comfortable everybody seemed,” she said. “You don't always get that.”

New Kensington resident Karen Ecker said the music therapy is a way to express grief without violence.

She has volunteered with the hospice for four years.

“It's just very, very relaxing and rewarding meeting other people and coming together in unison and in peace,” she said.

Emily Balsler is a Tribune-Review staff writer. Reach her at 724-226-4680, emilybalsler@tribweb.com or on Twitter [@emilybalsler](https://twitter.com/emilybalsler).