Jennifer Lamphere, a Paducah couple hopes to spread message of national organization

BY REBECCA FELDHAUS

Jennifer Lamphere's daughter was nothing to worry about. During an ultrasound, her doctors told her, "Your daughter will be born as a result of a complete placental abruption at 34 weeks of gestation. Their grief was overwhelming, but they are not alone. And after connecting with another couple who lost their very own Gracie, the Lampheres have found a way to educate and hopefully prevent others from going through the same loss.

Just a few months after they lost their daughter in 2009, Jennifer Lamphere's mother was looking online for a Christmas gift for her daughter and son-in-law. She stumbled upon Missing GRACE, a foundation striving to offer support and resources for pregnancy or infant loss, infertility and adoption. Jennifer Lamphere called the contact number and found an ally.

McVicar's doctors told her, "I had many doctors tell me that my daughter did not have to die," McVicar said.

Jennifer Lamphere said her main goal with the foundation is to educate parents as well as health care professionals in knowing what to do when they suspect something might be wrong with a pregnancy.

Jennifer Lamphere said she is in constant need of volunteers. Even if a volunteer can't be constantly on call, they could mow a lawn, cook a meal, or babysit other children while parents are out. Any assistance is welcome to grieving parents. "We have been trained in professional stillbirth photography and videography to help the parents remember the child they lost," McVicar said.

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The first goal is to lessen the number of stillbirths and infant deaths. If the unthinkable does happen, McVicar wants to change the way the parents and the public perceive grief. Parents who loss a child have limited time with their son or daughter, she said. She wants those parents to have the unique grieving opportunity they need. It's not like any other friend or family member dying, McVicar said. It's a grief like nothing else.

Jennifer Lamphere is now a leader of one of only three physical support groups in the nation. Two of them are in McVicar's home state of Minnesota. Paducah is the only location outside Minnesota where families can meet in person to discuss their loss and work toward supporting each other.

So far the meetings are slow-going, but a recent breakthrough keeps Lamphere optimistic. Saint Francis Medical Center in Cape Girardeau, Miss. just signed a contract with Missing GRACE to provide crisis care support for families who have a stillbirth or infant death. Jennifer Lamphere said they have not yet made contracts with any Paducah hospitals, but they are constantly working on making that connection.

As part of the crisis care team, Jennifer Lamphere is on call 24 hours a day. Many of her crisis care teammates are people whose lives have been affected by pregnancy or infant loss. It's not just mothers, she said. It's aunts, grandparents and fathers. The team brings in a comfort basket filled with handmaid garments, candles and other mementos to help honor the lost child.

Jennifer Lamphere said one important aspect of the crisis care team’s work is photography. She, as well as her peers, have been trained in professional stillbirth photography and videography to help the parents remember the child they lost. McVicar said photographs of a deceased infant might seem unorthodox, but it’s important for families to remember their details very well. As they fade in their memory, those photos and videos are considered priceless.

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