

## Joey

Joey was a terminally ill 5-year-old boy whose doctors at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia could do no more to help him. Believing he had only a few more months to live, the hospital social worker and DYFS contacted The Children's Home Society of New Jersey to support Joey as his condition worsened and to provide his family with Separation and Loss counseling as they coped with the imminent death of their beloved son and brother. We learned that Joey's mother and his 7 brothers and sisters had recently relocated to New Jersey from Philadelphia.

They were living in an unheated two-room apartment with only one working burner on the kitchen stove and just a few blankets for the beds they shared. Joey's mother was still reeling over her divorce from Joey's father, a drug dealer now in prison. She had gone into a deep depression because of Joey's illness and the many difficulties she faced alone.



Because the family had no money for oil or winter clothing, the apartment was cold and the children were clad in shorts and summer tops on the early winter day our CHSofNJ caseworker first visited with them. The children were eager to meet and speak with her. During that first visit, our CHSofNJ social worker arranged with an agency resource to supply the family with an immediate delivery of a full tank of oil to heat the apartment. She also placed the family on our Christmas list, and a few weeks later was able to bring them blankets, sheets, towels, jackets, winter clothes, toys and even a new television that had been donated for them.

During the time she worked with Joey and his family, our CHS of NJ social worker helped the children make a "memory book" filled with photos of Joey and stories of things he had done and said so they would remember him after he was gone. She also gave supportive counseling to Joey's mother and helped her assume full-time care for him until he died.

We kept this family on our caseload longer than usual to help them get through Joey's death. We also helped his mother earn her GED, obtain a driver's license and find a daytime job. A year later she was able to get a mortgage on a recently rehabilitated home. Since English was not the family's first language, their accomplishments were even more remarkable. In this case, all family members were eager to receive our counseling and make the changes necessary to improve their lives.

They worked hard to help each other survive a very sad and tragic loss. Ironically, Joey's illness gave his life a special meaning as it inspired everyone in the family to find their way back to a better life. Today, with the compassionate support of our CHS of NJ caseworker, Joey's family has become an inspiration to all of us in survival and carrying on.

**Joey's family was able to understand and make peace with his passing through CHSofNJ's Childhood Separation and Loss Support.**