



AFSP Lifekeeper Memory Quilt Program: Informational Packet for Quilt Organizers

afsp.org/quilt



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

Introduction

This informational packet was created for those who are interested in volunteering as American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) Lifekeeper Memory Quilt organizers. It describes the history of the program, outlines volunteer responsibilities, and gives suggestions on how to create and display and store quilts.

If you have any questions after reviewing this packet, please contact your local AFSP chapter, which you can find at afsp.org/chapters, or the Loss and Healing Department at survivingsuicideloss@afsp.org.

History and Purpose

The Lifekeeper Memory Quilt Program was created in 1997 by Sandy Martin, who lost her son, Tony, to suicide. Sandy believed survivors of suicide loss have an opportunity to use their experience “to do good, to work to dispel the myths, and to educate about suicide and its prevention.”

Sandy felt strongly that putting a human face on the tragedy of suicide would help bring much needed attention to this important cause and thus, created the Lifekeeper Memory Quilt Program.

Each quilt is comprised of fabric squares created by suicide loss survivors with a mix of photos, text, or graphics in memory of loved ones. Providing a creative outlet for loss survivors, the quilts serve as memories of loved ones lost to suicide, and the hope for continued work in suicide prevention. Each time quilts are displayed, it helps increase public awareness of suicide.

When Sandy passed away in 2006, the program was transferred to SPAN USA, in accordance with her wishes. In 2009, SPAN USA became the advocacy arm of AFSP, and the Lifekeeper Memory Quilt Program became a program of the Loss & Healing Department. AFSP gratefully acknowledges the work of all the volunteers who have dedicated themselves to this program since its inception.

What Does a Quilt Organizer Do?

Quilt Organizer Primary Responsibilities

- Reach out to local loss survivors to promote the program
- Collect completed quilt blocks/squares from loss survivors
- Oversee the sewing of quilt blocks/squares into a finished quilt
- Display finished quilts at local and/or national events
- Communicate with local AFSP staff to maintain and store completed quilts

The Basics of Creating a Quilt

Timeline

We recommend giving yourself a timeline of six to 12 months, from start to finish, for each quilt. The timeline varies depending upon size of the quilt, how long it takes to collect finished blocks from loss survivors, and how much time you can dedicate to working on the project on a weekly or monthly basis. We recommend setting the deadline for completion to be a few weeks before the event where you'd like to display the quilt for the very first time. For instance, many quilt organizers plan the completion of a quilt to coordinate with **International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day** – always the Saturday before American Thanksgiving in November – or a local **Out of the Darkness™ Community Walk**, typically in the Fall.

Sewing Skills

As a quilt organizer, you are responsible for having the quilt sewn together. If you happen to already be a proficient sewer, that's great. However, if you are not great at sewing, or not comfortable sewing the quilt yourself, that's ok too! Many quilt organizers find community members or groups that might offer their sewing skills to the project. Local quilt shops or fabric stores may be able to give suggestions or advice, and may connect you with other resources.

Quilt Construction

Because AFSP Lifekeeper Memory Quilts are meant for display only, they don't need to have quilt batting (the layer of insulation that gives real quilts their weight and warmth for practical usage as blankets). In using only fabric to create a quilt-like appearance, the quilts are lightweight and easy to store, transport, and display. However, quilts should have a back layer of fabric to hide any seams, which will create a neat appearance and allow you to display them anywhere without the need to worry about hiding the back against a wall. A "sleeve" or loops should be sewn along the top edge, similar to what you would find on a window curtain, so a rod or clothesline can be passed through.

Size and Shape

The size of the quilt blocks will vary depending on the number of blocks to be included in the quilt. If using inkjet printing fabric, the blocks will be determined by the page size.

We recommend that finished quilts are no larger than six feet by six feet. Quilts that are larger than this are often too difficult to transport and display. Also be mindful that quilts significantly smaller than that may not have as powerful an impact.

AFSP Logo

Each quilt must include a block with the AFSP logo. Contact survivingsuicideloss@afsp.org to receive the AFSP logo. In addition, you may want to add extra quilt blocks that note the year the quilt was created, the state, region, or city that the quilt represents, or the special population that it honors. You may also add blocks that are purely decorative.

Design, Layout, Border Fabric, and Colors

While the maximum size of the finished quilt should not be larger than six feet by six feet and must contain the AFSP Logo, the overall design, layout of blocks, color and border fabric choices are entirely up to you. Part of the beauty of the AFSP Lifekeeper Quilt Program is the unique nature of every quilt, so we welcome your creativity.

Creating Quilt Blocks

You may have loss survivors design their block using basic computer programs like Word, PowerPoint, Photoshop Elements, Publisher. Their digital document will need to have a one inch border, and can be sent electronically to you for transfer onto fabric. There are a number of ways to transfer photos to fabric, so you'll have to choose a method that fits your time schedule, your skill level, and your budget.

You can find a plethora of video tutorials online that will give step-by-step instruction on how to make a memory or photo quilt. One of the most common methods is to use pre-treated fabric sheets that are compatible with ink jet printers. Some favorites are *Printed Treasures by Milliken*, *Avery Printable Fabric for Ink Jet Printers* or *June Tailor Computer Printer Fabric*. They can be found at quilt shops, craft stores, office supply stores or online.

Another option is to send a packet directly to the loss survivor containing fabric and instructions on how to create the quilt block, with a self-addressed envelope for returning the finished quilt block.

You may also want to consider organizing informal gatherings where local survivors of suicide loss can come together to make their blocks. Ideally, you'd have all of the needed supplies available: a computer, color scanner and printer, photo transfer paper, iron, ironing board, fabric markers and/or paints.

Storing and Transporting Quilts

Store and transport quilts with utmost care, so they will remain clean and pristine condition for years to come. Once you complete the quilt, the memories, stories and pictures become part of the fabric of our community. For that reason, we ask that all quilts become property of the local AFSP chapter for future use.

Note: When folding a quilt made with iron-on photo transfers, it's important to be sure to make folds between the photos. If you fold the photos, over time they will crease, and may flake off. It is preferred the quilt be stored with other chapter materials and supplies, and you can contact your local field staff to make these arrangements.

Displaying Quilts

Displaying Lifekeeper Memory Quilts at local and national events is an integral part of the program. Each time quilts are displayed, it helps increase public awareness of suicide as a significant issue.

These quilts represent the memory of many loved ones, and should be treated with the utmost care and respect when displayed. Be mindful of the surface they are laying on or propped against.

When You're Finished

While we hope that you'll volunteer as a quilt organizer for many years, we recognize that there may come a time when you are ready to step down. If and when that time comes, please notify the AFSP Loss and Healing Department as soon as possible, who will then connect with the local AFSP chapter in providing instructions on the return of all quilts, records, and other related materials.

Thank you for your willingness to continue this important work by becoming an AFSP Lifekeeper Memory Quilt organizer. Have any questions? Contact your local chapter at afsp.org/chapters or the Loss and Healing Department of AFSP at survivingsuicideloss@afsp.org.

Digital Memory Quilt

In addition to the AFSP Lifekeeper Memory Quilt program, loss survivors can also make quilt squares digitally. The Digital Memory Quilt program is an online space where suicide loss survivors everywhere can honor their loved ones by using photos and stories that serve as squares in our virtual quilt. Digital Memory Quilt squares are searchable and can be created at afsp.org/quilt.

