

Resources Abound for Families who Lose an Infant

May 27, 2020, was a heart-wrenching day Bryanna Dobbs will never forget.

But it was also a day that set the home day care operator on a journey of empowerment and planted the seed of a bond with an OSF HealthCare Mission Partners who cared for her.

Dobbs and her husband Austin were at the [Blessed Beginnings Birthing Center](#) at OSF HealthCare Heart of Mary Medical Center in Urbana, Illinois. The Villa Grove, Illinois, couple was preparing to welcome their daughter, Ivy Faye. Instead, Dobbs suffered a stillbirth.

“We don’t have a whole lot of answers as to what happened,” Dobbs says. “We think it was an [umbilical] cord accident, and I kind of dealt with some low fluid problems.”

Pregnancy loss is more common than people think, says Emily Ontis, a registered nurse at OSF Heart of Mary who was Dobbs’ nurse in 2020. Statistics show around one to two in 10 women will suffer a [miscarriage](#), which is pregnancy loss in the first 20 weeks of pregnancy. Some mothers may suffer [multiple miscarriages](#). A stillbirth – the loss of a baby before or during delivery – affects around one in 160 births in the United States, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

The issue also got mainstream attention in May of 2022, when pop star Britney Spears announced she lost her child early in her pregnancy.

Since May of 2020, Dobbs has been on a healing journey and says speaking out about the loss of Ivy helps. Dobbs has promoted random acts of kindness [in honor of Ivy](#). She’s connected with a local support group, and the group is planning a summer retreat with other families who share the unfortunate circumstance.

And just last month, Dobbs and her family were at OSF Heart of Mary to donate a [bereavement library](#) for the birthing center. The library includes children’s books that other families dealing with a loss can read at the hospital then take home – all to help the grieving process. By staying in touch with Dobbs, Ontis was able to coordinate the donation with Mission Partners at OSF Heart of Mary.

“When we lost Ivy, we spent a few hours with her. And we didn't know what to do. We were lost. We were just in shock and confused,” Dobbs says. “And we spent that time singing to her and talking to her about our family and the boys and the things that we wish we could do with her. And one thing we never thought of was reading to her.”

Dobbs says reading helped her two sons cope with the loss of Ivy, even reading as a family at Ivy’s gravesite. So Dobbs is hoping the books will benefit others, too.

The bereavement library is the latest pregnancy loss resource at OSF Heart of Mary. Families can get blankets and clothing for their infant during the short time they are together at the hospital. Long term, memory boxes are available for families to store reminders like keychains, bracelets, and the child’s handprint, footprint, or a lock of hair.

Another item, a cuddle cot, gives families the gift of time, Ontis says.

“It goes in the bassinet. It's just like a cooling mattress. It's quiet. It's off the side so that the parents in the family can have the baby with them in the room the whole time,” Ontis says. “Previously, if they wanted to have the baby for a long time, it would have to go back and forth from morgue to be cooled. So this way, they have that there to kind of prevent the baby from deteriorating and keeping them in the best condition.”

The pastoral care team at OSF HealthCare hospitals can also connect families with counseling and support groups. And when it comes to that healing process, Bryanna Dobbs, Austin Dobbs, and Ontis all agree: Don't try to go at it alone.

“There's still such a stigma behind it. And a lot of people don't come out and talk about it. And so people don't realize that they know someone that this happened to. They know many people this has happened to,” Ontis says. “It's already isolating enough. So we always recommend support groups, having those close knit people that you can just go to with this information.”

“Through a healthy foundation and support system, it's really made the healing process a lot easier and made it made us stronger through it all as a family,” Austin Dobbs says. “Just opened our eyes to just every aspect of life and not taking anything for granted.”

Families dealing with pregnancy loss can reach out to their primary care provider to be connected with resources.