

The Oak Connection

Big Bend Hospice

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We Inspire Hope



Beyond the Benefit:

How Big Bend Hospice Prioritizes People Over Profit

As the region's only not-for-profit hospice provider, Big Bend Hospice delivers care that goes further, offering comfort, dignity, and support for every patient, every time.

Big Bend Hospice is proud to be the region's only not-for-profit hospice and palliative care provider. As a mission-driven organization, we believe in putting people over profits, ensuring that every member of our community has access to compassionate, high-quality care, regardless of their financial situation.

When a patient begins care with Big Bend Hospice, they are supported by a dedicated interdisciplinary team that includes a registered nurse, a social worker, and a spiritual counselor. This core team provides the foundation of our care, making sure each patient receives personalized support for their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

What truly sets Big Bend Hospice apart is our commitment to going beyond the traditional hospice benefit. In addition to essential services, we offer a variety of specialized programs that enrich the patient and family experience. These include music therapy, compassionate touch, animal-assisted therapy, virtual reality experiences, enhanced bereavement support, and veteran-centered care.

We are also proud to offer care in two comfortable inpatient facilities: the **Margaret Z. Dozier Hospice House** and the **First Commerce Center for Compassionate Care**. These peaceful settings are designed to feel like home and provide 24/7 care for patients needing short-term inpatient support.



This year, we introduced the Sunset Program, a thoughtful initiative focused on the final seven days of life. The program is designed to increase care intensity and ensure that every patient experiences the highest level of comfort, dignity, and emotional support during this sacred time. It includes specialized care planning and an increased presence from our interdisciplinary team to support both patients and their loved ones.

At Big Bend Hospice, we are honored to walk alongside individuals and families during life's most meaningful moments, providing expert care, heartfelt compassion, and unwavering support every step of the way.

Thank you for being part of our mission.

Amanda N. Gustafson

Amanda Gustafson

Big Bend Hospice Chief Operating Officer



Introducing The Oak Connection

An Eye into Big Bend Hospice

We're honored to welcome you to the first edition of The Oak Connection, a quarterly newsletter from Big Bend Hospice designed with you, our community, in mind.

Why The Oak Connection?

We're honored to welcome you to the first edition of The Oak Connection, a quarterly newsletter from Big Bend Hospice designed with you, our community, in mind.

We chose to name this newsletter The Oak Connection with great intention. The oak tree is our organization's logo. The oak tree symbolizes strength, endurance, and shelter. Our organization is deeply rooted in compassion, community, and service. The branches of our oak tree stretch wide, touching many lives, just like the care we provide and the relationships we nurture across the communities we serve.



This newsletter is where stories grow, connections flourish, and our shared commitment to compassionate care is our priority. Each issue will offer meaningful updates, spotlight the people and partners making a difference, and highlight ways you can stay involved in the work of Big Bend Hospice.

We hope The Oak Connection becomes a trusted source of encouragement, information, and inspiration for caregivers, families, professionals, volunteers, and anyone with a heart for hospice care.

Thank you for being a vital part of our journey. Together, we are growing something strong and beautiful, rooted in community and guided by love.

Respectfully,

Travia Cromartie

Travia Cromartie, MSW, LSSGB
Marketing and Community Relations Manager

With Gratitude

As the Community Relations Coordinator, I've heard from many of you who are eager to stay informed about the latest updates from Big Bend Hospice, your hometown hospice for over 40 years.

In response, we are excited to introduce The Oak Connection to keep you updated on our work and our ongoing dedication to the families we serve.

As we continue to grow and expand our services to better meet the evolving needs of the eight counties we are honored to serve, this newsletter will offer a closer look at how we are making an impact. By providing care, compassion, and support at every stage of life's journey, we hope these updates will help you better understand how we show up for our community.

We genuinely appreciate your involvement and encourage you to stay with us as we expand our reach and impact. We look forward to sharing more of our stories with you in the coming months. Your support will be essential in helping us make a positive difference in the lives of so many.



Thank you for your continued support.

Asya Griffin

Asya Griffin
Business Development/
Community Outreach Coordinator



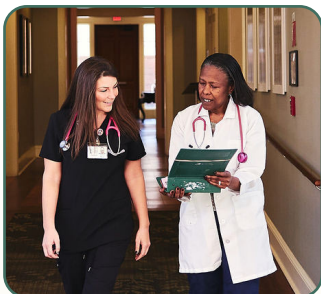
About Big Bend Hospice

Your Hometown Hospice

Founded in 1983 as the first non-profit hospice in Tallahassee, Big Bend Hospice has remained deeply rooted in the Big Bend region, proudly serving families across Franklin, Gadsden, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Madison, Taylor, and Wakulla counties.

We are committed to delivering personalized care and exceptional support, ensuring that every patient is treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

What truly sets Big Bend Hospice (BBH) apart is our dedicated and compassionate team and the wide range of services and specialized programs we offer. In addition to expert Hospice Care, Inpatient Care, and Palliative Care, we provide unique and meaningful support through programs such as Music Therapy, Animal Therapy, Bereavement Support, Spiritual Care, Veterans Care, and the Caregiver Renewal Institute. At BBH, we go beyond care; we create comfort, connection, and compassion for our entire community.



Common Myths:

The Truth about Big Bend Hospice Care

When it comes to hospice care, misconceptions are common—and they can prevent individuals and families from getting the support they need. From who qualifies for hospice to what services are provided, we're here to clear up some of the most persistent myths and help you better understand the compassionate, comprehensive care hospice truly offers.



Hospice is only for people who are bed-bound and have only a few days to live.

The Truth: Hospice care starts when a doctor says there is no cure and life expectancy is 6 months or less. The earlier you start a hospice, the more services you can get. Patients can still work, attend events, or travel while receiving care.

Hospice is for people with "no hope."

The Truth: Hospice helps patients live fully with pain managed and support from loved ones. It's about making the most of the time left, and patients can return to treatment if they wish. Some patients even improve and leave hospice care.

Hospice is a place.

The Truth: Hospice is a type of care, not a location. It can be provided at home, in nursing homes, assisted living facilities, or hospitals.

Hospice is only for cancer patients.

The Truth: Only 33% of our patients have cancer. Hospice helps people with many illnesses, like heart, lung, kidney diseases, and dementia.

Hospice care is too expensive and will use up all my money.

The Truth: Hospice care is covered by Medicare, Medicaid, and most insurances. It includes medications and equipment. We also offer sliding fees for those without insurance and never turn anyone away due to cost.

Hospice makes people overly sedated or addicted to pain medication.

The Truth: Pain management is handled carefully to keep patients comfortable but alert. The goal is for patients to enjoy each day as much as possible.



Transitions Supportive Care

Providing Compassionate Palliative Care to Our Community

We're excited to share some recent updates from the Transitions Supportive Care (TSC) program!

As of this month, we are currently supporting 348 patients across our service areas, a number that reflects the growing trust and engagement of the community in the care we provide.

For those who may not be familiar, TSC is a community-based palliative care program that supports individuals with serious illnesses who may not yet be eligible for or interested in hospice care. The program is designed to help patients and families navigate complex medical decisions, manage symptoms, and coordinate care, offering an added layer of support during a challenging time.

Our team continues to focus on ensuring smooth transitions for patients with complex care needs, providing personalized support, expert care coordination, and advocacy every step of the way. As the healthcare landscape evolves, so do we, adapting our services to better meet the needs of our community.



We're grateful for the continued collaboration from our partners and community members, and we look forward to expanding our impact in the months ahead.

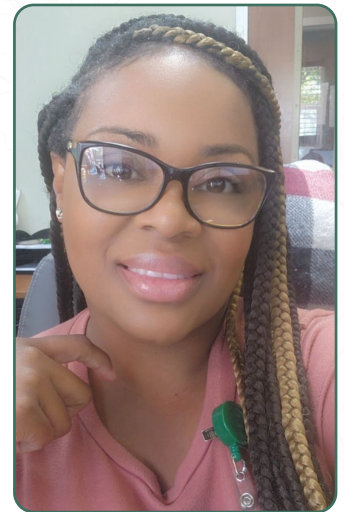
Thank you for your ongoing support!

Fabiola Jean-Charles, MSW
Director of Transitions Supportive Care

Team Member Spotlight: Jasmin Smith

Jasmine serves as a Referral Intake Specialist for both our Transitions Supportive Care & Big Bend Hospice programs.

Big Bend Hospice is proud to recognize Jasmin Smith, a dedicated and compassionate team member who plays a vital role in supporting patients and families during some of life's most challenging moments.



Jasmin serves as a Referral Intake Specialist for both our Transitions Supportive Care (TSC) and Big Bend Hospice programs. Her passion for helping others, especially older adults, is what led her to this work. "My genuine care for others and desire to make a difference led me here," she shares.

In her dual role, Jasmin guides patients, families, and providers through the initial steps of care, helping them navigate the referral process with empathy and clarity. She takes great pride in being a trusted resource during times when many are overwhelmed and unsure where to turn. Whether she's educating families on palliative care options through TSC or coordinating hospice referrals, Jasmin leads with compassion and calm.

Her daily responsibilities include managing incoming referrals, answering calls, processing documentation, verifying medical details, and ensuring compliance with Medicare and insurance requirements. She works across multiple electronic systems while maintaining seamless communication with physicians, hospital discharge planners, and interdisciplinary care teams. It's a demanding role that requires both precision and heart, and Jasmin delivers both every day.

Her commitment to excellence ensures that every patient is met with timely, respectful care. Her colleagues describe her as steady, reliable, and always willing to go the extra mile.

Thank you, Jasmin, for the care you bring to every conversation, every chart, and every family. You make a meaningful difference, one referral at a time!

Community Initiatives!

Committed to supporting the communities we serve

During the first quarter, BBH had the privilege of hosting its inaugural Caregiving with Heart Conference on March 22, 2025, at the Old West Enrichment Center. The event provided valuable insights and support for caregivers, while connecting them with healthcare organizations dedicated to improving care and overall well-being.



A Special Thanks to Our Sponsors:

Big Bend Hospice, The Alzheimer's Project, Inc., ACTS2 Caregiver Project, Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare (TMH), Humana Healthy Horizons, Alisha Clayton – State Farm Agent, Dee Ministries, Robert L. Glueckauf, Elder Care Services, Inc., and the Area Agency on Aging for North Florida.



We're excited to share that BBH will be making the Caregiving with Heart Conference an annual event! So, if you missed it this year, be sure to stay tuned for details of the 2026 conference.

County Advisory Councils



We sincerely thank the Jefferson County and Taylor County Advisory Councils for their thoughtful gesture in assembling goodie baskets and cookie platters for TMH partners in Monticello, Florida, and Doctor's Memorial Hospital in Perry, Florida.

We are truly grateful for the continued dedication and service of all our Advisory Councils across the eight counties we serve. Your ongoing support is instrumental in advancing the mission of Big Bend Hospice, and we look forward to our continued collaboration in serving our communities with compassion and care.

Bethpage Missionary Baptist Church



We would also like to take this opportunity to honor Reverend Isaac Manning of Bethpage Missionary Baptist Church. On January 5, we had the privilege of attending a special presentation hosted at the church, which focused on dispelling common myths about hospice care, addressing the top ten frequently asked questions, and discussing the importance of advanced care planning.

Reverend Manning has been a tremendous partner in helping us build meaningful connections within the Jefferson County church community. His unwavering support and commitment to outreach have played a vital role in fostering open and compassionate conversations around end-of-life care. We are truly grateful for his leadership, generosity, and dedication to the well-being of his congregation and the broader community.

We are currently accepting appointments for advanced care planning conversations. If you or someone you know is interested, please contact Asya Griffin or Travia Cromartie at (850) 878-5310.



A Letter to Future Volunteers

For the Friends and Family of Our Staff

Dear Future Volunteer, you might be feeling a mix of curiosity and uncertainty, and that's completely natural.

Many people tell me they were hesitant at first. Maybe you're unsure what hospice really involves or worried you won't know what to say or do. Some imagine it's constantly sad, or fear they'll say the wrong thing.

Others wonder if they need a special skill or background to be helpful. Let me gently clear some of those clouds. Hospice volunteering isn't about fixing, or saving, or having the perfect words. It's not even about doing much at all. It's about being, being present, being kind, and being willing to share space with someone during one of life's most meaningful and vulnerable times.

You might sit quietly and listen to someone's stories. You might hold a hand. You might simply share the silence. And through those simple, human moments, something beautiful happens connection. What surprises many new volunteers is how often they leave feeling full, not heavy. Full of perspective. Full of quiet gratitude. Full of admiration for the strength and wisdom they've witnessed. Full of appreciation for life, in all its rawness and tenderness.

And you won't be alone in this work. We provide thorough training, and our team is here to guide and support you every step of the way. Fellow volunteers often become dear friends, part of a compassionate community that understands the power of presence. Hospice is about life, not just the end of life, but the honoring of a life well lived.

Volunteering here is one of the most profoundly human things you can do.

So, if you're still wondering whether you're "the right kind of person" for this... let me gently say: *if you're still reading, you probably are.*

Katie Mandell

Katie Mandell, CVA
Volunteer Manager

Shop, Donate, and Volunteer to Support Our Mission! Oak Tree Treasures



Oak Tree Treasures is a unique resale shop in Tallahassee with a meaningful mission: supporting the compassionate care provided by Big Bend Hospice.

Every purchase, donation, and volunteer hour directly help fund vital care services and therapeutic programs—ensuring that end-of-life care remains accessible to patients, families, and our community, regardless of their ability to pay.



Store Hours:

Tuesday – Saturday: 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Closed Sunday & Monday

Upcoming Events

We hope to See You There!

May 15	Spring Fling
June 6	Caregiver Resource Group Meeting at Madison Memorial Hospital
June 10	Father's Day Grief Workshop
June 12	Bereavement Buddy Walk
June 13-14	Watermelon Festival Monticello, FL

For more information on any items in this newsletter, please contact Asya Griffin at agriffin@bigbendhospice.org or (850) 508-5407.