Families struggling with the loss and grief that comes with COVID-19 can get much-needed comfort and support thanks to specially trained Red Cross volunteers like Abbie Colussi.

Colussi, a disaster mental health lead from Helena, is part of a nationwide network of mental health, spiritual care and health services volunteers who serve as the backbone of the Red Cross Virtual Family Assistance Center. Over the phone, these volunteers offer condolences, connect families to state and local resources, provide support for virtual memorial services and host online classes that build resiliency and coping skills.

“It’s extreme-ly important to be able to sup-port our fellow neighbors out there who are impacted by COVID,” Colussi said. “Sometimes they feel like they don’t know where to go — they feel like they don’t know who to talk to — and for many people it’s easier to be in the comfort of their home and to be able to make a phone call and connect with someone.”

Colussi said they’re hearing from people who are mourning the loss of a loved one and those who have lost their job and are trying to figure out how to make next month’s rent, including a mother and her four children who were living in their car.

One call in particular stands out to Colussi: A call in August 2020 from a woman who had lost her job and faced eviction.

Support available to families grieving loss
Urgent need for shelters workers

During the current pandemic, we have established new guidelines for sheltering designed to keep our workers and clients safe, such as setting up more small shelters, each with fewer clients. Please consider supporting our mission to prevent and alleviate human suffering by helping during this hurricane and wildfire season. During this unprecedented time, volunteers like you are helping to provide critical support to our communities.

Never deployed before? Get started on your training now to get out the door and make a difference. Please share with your friends and family who might also be a good fit.

If you are willing, able and interested, please contact Recruitment Specialist Gini Kay at 406-493-8778 or email IDMT.Recruiting@redcross.org. Learn more about our most-needed volunteer opportunities at www.redcross.org/volunteertoday.

Providing comfort, care in Gardiner

Red Cross disaster responders provided assistance to at least nine people displaced by the multi-building fire in Gardiner in mid-July. The volunteers met with clients, providing them with food and lodging assistance, helping replace medications and lost medical supplies and connecting them with mental health resources.

Loss: All services free, confidential

Colussi. A service member told the team his father was in the hospital and was severely ill. He had been granted leave but didn’t have the money to pay for a plane ticket back home to see his dad one final time. The family assistance center was able to connect him with the Red Cross Service to the Armed Forces program, which provided the man the financial help he needed to make the trip.

“That felt really good to be able to help him,” she said.

To learn more or request help, visit https://www.redcross.org/get-help.html or call 833-492-0094.

All the work is done virtually and is free and confidential.

Quilts: ‘Cradled in hope, kept in joy’

Pat doesn’t include her name, but a fellow quilter who lost her house to a fire tracked her down so she could send a thank you. It takes a fellow quilter to really appreciate all the work that goes into a homemade quilt.

Pat uses a variety of patterns to keep things interesting or to showcase a particular fabric. When arthritis forced a friend in her church to give up quilting, she passed fabric and thread onto Pat for the project. Pat recently used those fabrics for a dragonfly quilt.

“The help that Pat’s received is in a dragonfly quilt. ‘With help like that, it’s really been a community effort,’” Pat said.

As for her parents’ quilt, which started it all, Pat passed it on to comfort another family in their moment of need.

— Story written by Red Cross writing team volunteer Kristen Isbady