



From the Director's Desk

The Complexity of Grief

The past 11 months tested us –devastating wildfires, COVID, the many personal, socio and economic ripples of COVID, a brutally disorienting year of politics, separation from others, from our rituals, and from many of our coping habits. Early in the pandemic there was a lot written about the loss of normalcy ([Harvard Business Review](#), [The Atlantic](#)) resulting in grief.

Grief is complex. Its cycle manifests as shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression and eventually acceptance. These days, we are grieving a generalized loss. I can walk through the post office (or read the news) and observe people in each of those stages. I'm in two or three myself. Whatever "background" issues we face individually are magnified by this cumulative grief. The last 11 months have left us a whole lot to unpack. That is before anything specifically devastating occurs.



When it does, normally, we in the Colorado high country rally for each other. We gather. We celebrate lives. We share food. We organize events. We mobilize fundraisers. We start non-profits for a cause. We actively remember together. Passing through difficulty often reinforces the fabric of our communities as we gather in closer. In many of these we are currently thwarted. A disorienting year of politics complicated the situation immensely—compounding our grief. Yet, we find ways. This social safety net is the very best of why we live in rural, remote places. The networks of close friends and acquaintances is deeper and broader than most of us recognize on a daily basis. Our lives touch many, and many lives touch us, if a bit more remotely lately.

When an avalanche in the San Juan Mountains thundered down a chute on the afternoon of Monday, Feb 1st, it captured and buried three backcountry skiers on a hut trip after a weekend of heli-skiing. These are the kind of risks we take living in the mountains in order to be out and taste our lives. I found it difficult to un-imagine what might have passed through the minds of those buried beneath—two of whom I've been blessed to know. I believe in the life-flashing-before-your-eyes thing.

I hope they saw the rich lives they lived. Others do. As hours of the search passed into days. It became clear the sudden event had taken the vibrant souls of three friends with family in the Town of Eagle, each of whom worked or had worked at Eagle County, two who were on the town council, one who owned the town watering hole: Bonfire Brewing, a go-to social place in town. Such lists are obituary observations. More difficult to convey is how each in his own way touched so many people-in their work,

in their play, in their service. Each played the role of “glue” in a number of circles.

The idea that Adam Palmer, Andy Jessen and Seth Bossung would not return home or to the work they loved, to serve where they were elected, to the watering hole, or out again to the places they loved to play, sent shock waves of disbelief hundreds of miles across the state. They would no longer bring smiles to the many circles of people to whom they mattered. This piece is not the place to eulogize at length about Adam, Andy or Seth. Auden Schendler did so beautifully [here](#) for Adam. The Town of Eagle and Eagle County released a joint statement reported in the Vail Daily [here](#). There will be more of that.

What I want to express here in acknowledging our specific grief, and our general grief is that those small acts, those connections add up. They don't add up as a game to win. They add up for something deeper. For Andy and Adam especially who served many tedious hours on town council in the service to their community, for Andy who anchored his very business in community, and for all three who reinforced the bonds that make this place so special in so many countless ways, thank you. They matter. You matter. Today matters. Today, for you and those little things you choose to do, and for this amazing region in which we live, I am deeply grateful. We will move through all of this together.

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P.S.

Honor grieving by being gentle and kind to those around you, and to yourself. This [article](#) by HuffPost is a good reminder that depression, which is one of the stages of grief, takes many forms; the article lists 10 signs. If there were ever a time to embrace therapy or other support, now is the time. There is no longer a stigma—we are all suffering, and national policy has changed the insurance landscape. Today, mental health is covered by most insurance policies.

Congratulations to Walowitz for Honorable Mention for State Award for Outstanding Service



NWCCOG congratulates Nate Walowitz for receiving Honorable Mention by Governor Jared Polis' office for Outstanding Service in Government for the Tom Clements Award on Tuesday, February 9th. Here is [the announcement](#). The nomination was put forth by DOLA, recognizing Walowitz's effort over one weekend this October as the Cameron Creek fires raged in October, to connect Estes Park with a redundant broadband path Westward through NWCCOG's Project THOR in Grand County back to Denver in case their primary connection through Fort Collins failed. It didn't, but the effort over one weekend was heroic and innovative, drawing upon tens of partners developed over the years through NWCCOG's broadband program. The effort was documented in this [Colorado Sun article](#). The specific award recognizing Walowitz was read by Lt Governor Diane Primavera.

The ceremony was held remotely, in a “virtual space” in which a who-is-who of state agency leaders were encouraged to applaud via American Sign Language by holding both hands open beside their heads and shaking them. Every time applause was appropriate there was a pause before some of the top leaders from Colorado remembered to shake their hands like joyous kindergarteners. Appropriately, the call started with the voices of kids in the background as many state leaders continue to work from home. Few had Zoom backgrounds disguising that fact. One awardee, clearly seated in his dining room, apologized to his wife for taking over the kitchen table this past year and for the indefinite future. Just as the Governor began speaking, Nates' mother, Anne Walowitz, could be heard saying aloud over the governor's voice, “it says there are 90 people.” She was quickly muted. Actually, at the peak of the call, there were 118 attendees.

It was quite an unusual occurrence for NWCCOG, a regional organization, to have an employee honored at an internal ceremony for state agencies. This was a result of the Regional Broadband Director being funded 50% by DOLA and having statewide responsibilities in addition to his regional work. Thank you to Greg Winkler for writing the nomination. As the other winners were acknowledged, the uniqueness of the honor became clearer. Lisa Kauffman, the Governor's Chief of staff introduced award winner—the leadership from the Colorado Department of Public Safety which included top brass at the Colorado State Patrol, the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management and the Colorado Bureau of Investigation among others for their response to the pandemic, wildfires and civil unrest in 2020, and for actualizing their “one CDPHS priority” in staying aligned to stay safer together. Also recognized – via a video from Colorado performer Nathaniel Rateliff--was the State COVID-19 Leadership Team, also called

the Pandemic Response Team, made up of leaders across various departments who were at the tip of the spear for most of 2020. Those recognized were accomplished leaders and rising stars from across state government.

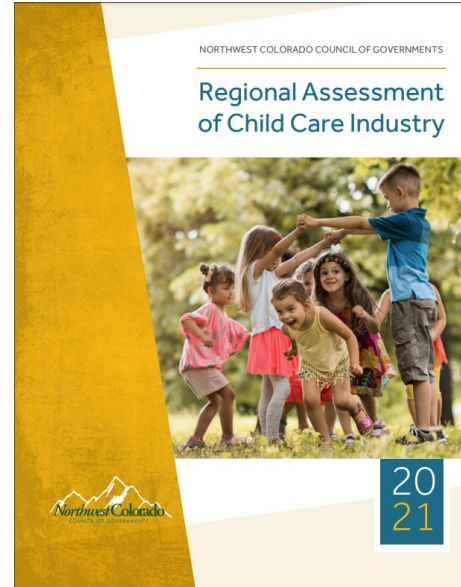
Tom Clements award honors Tom's 30 years of public service as the Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Corrections who passed in 2013. His wife, Lisa, spoke on the call noting that "he was a student of leadership." She also shared a quote from Colin Powell, one of Tom's favorite leaders who said, "Organization doesn't really accomplish anything. Plans don't accomplish anything, either. Theories of management don't much matter. Endeavors succeed or fail because of the people involved. Only by attracting the best people will you accomplish great deeds."

Published: NWCCOG Regional Assessment of Child Care Industry Report

NWCCOG would like to thank Council for enthusiastic support for this project. One of the silver linings of the 2020 Pandemic may be a heightened recognition of the need for a more sustainable model for supporting the Early Childhood Education. The report is written to be a tool for local leaders. It explains the barriers to access while also highlighting many local innovations across the region including tuition assistance from "Grand Beginnings" in Grand County, "El Busito" a program in the Roaring Fork providing bilingual preschool education to 100 Latinx children across multiple neighborhoods, as well as various employer driven solutions. One takeaway from the report is that the industry, which is critical to the health of our economy, our working families and community's' future, was operating on shoestring margins before the COVID event, and since the event is on life support. In spite of recent funding, there is no national or state plan to save local childcare centers. This is a matter of local concern for local leadership to address.

The report raises awareness, offers options, calls to action and establishes a framework for further discussions. It is intended to be used locally as a workbook to structure conversations among leaders which might lead to further innovations, and perhaps drive policy change at other levels.

NWCCOG appreciates the amazing work of GPS Consulting (Brian Pool, Laura Sigrist and Greg Bellomo) which researched and wrote the report, and Mary Kenyon and Nuria who formatted it for publication. We would also like to thank each member of the working group who are all listed on page 5 of the report which can be downloaded [here](#).



In Process: NWCCOG and CAST "Mountain Migration" Report

Members, be on the lookout in early March to help distribute a Survey which, along with Focus Groups and original research by consultants, Wendy Sullivan of WSW Consulting and Melanie Rees of Rees Consulting will be the backbone of input for this report. The report seeks to understand if those who, during COVID have helped put our resort region at nearly full occupancy intend to stay here, how they are working & living, how their views on these places are changing. The regional Working Group has been established. Survey announcement will be in early March. Report is intended for release by June.

Congratulations Jonnah Glassman for successful SHIP Certification

Jonnah Glassman, the new SHIP Coordinator for NWCCOG, has completed the State Health Insurance certification training. SHIP coordinators throughout the country attend this extensive training program broken in to four categories: Medicare Basics, Medicare



Coverage, Appeals and Penalties, Other Insurance and assistance, and takes about 3-4 hours to complete each step followed by 18 small tests.

After having successfully completed the program, Glassman stated, "Going through this process has made me confident in the wealth of knowledge all our SHIP Counselors possess, allowing them to be highly qualified to provide FREE education and guidance on Medicare to the community. This extremely important service we provide would not be possible without the help of our wonderful volunteers."

If you know anyone interested in giving back to older adults in their community and joining our wonderful team of Volunteer SHIP Counselors please reach out to Jonnah Glassman 970-315-1328 Jglassman@NWCCOG.org

Next Council Meeting

Thursday, March 25, 2021 Full Council Meeting

Location: Zoom Conference Call, On-Site Location TBD

Time: 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Primary Agenda Items: Approval of final 2020 financials; program overviews.