

Spring 2012

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Note from the Chair
Lara Kitts



I just finished taping the video footage for our WOOD TV *Connecting with Community* segment. It truly is an exciting honor to be a finalist for this award! The exposure we'll get to the West Michigan community is wonderful for us at this stage in our development. Our selection as a finalist is based on our Community Partnership program, which links our therapy providers and our scholarship recipients to create a solid collaboration which ensures accountability for donor dollars as well as quality therapeutic interventions for families.

Our video reflects the collaboration beautifully, with one of our Community Partners, Kid at Heart Therapy, and a scholarship recipient family joining me for the interview. I want to thank them both for graciously agreeing to be on television and especially to the Reier family for opening their home for the entire interview experience! The best part about it all was seeing first hand how the therapy scholarship from Family Hope Foundation has changed this family. We got to hear from both Nicholas' mother and his therapist how much he has gained developmentally in the last year due to therapy. But, the most touching part of the day was to hear his mother talk about how therapy has taught Nicholas to play with his sister, a huge milestone that changes the dynamic of this family forever.

Bringing Hope...Changing Lives...Strengthening Families

Lara Kitts

Family Fun Events – Spring & Summer Lineup

Saturday, April 28 Chimpanzee *

Saturday, May 5 Family Day at the YMCA's Camp Manitou-Lin, 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.

RSVP at <https://sites.google.com/site/fhfevent/> by May 3 to enjoy a family camp day with hayride, animal farm, s'mores, crafts, rock climbing and archery. Bring your own picnic lunch.

Saturday, May 26 Pirates! Band of Misfits *

Saturday, June 30 Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted *

Saturday, July 28 Ice Age: Continental Drift *

Saturday, August 18 Family Night at the Visser YMCA in Grandville, 5:30 – 8:30 p.m. More details to come.

Saturday, August 25 Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Dog Days *



*All movies are \$5 per ticket, 10:00 a.m. showtime, first come-first served seating. We have the theatre to ourselves! *Celebration! Cinema North*, 2121 Celebration Drive, NE, Grand Rapids
* * *



Sign up for Family Hope Foundation's email listserv! We'll keep you up-to-date on the details of these and other upcoming events, as well as share all the valuable resources and information going on in our special needs community. Contact Lara Kitts at lara.kitts@thefamilyhopefoundation.org to sign up! Call (616) 780-3839 for questions.

Bringing Hope...



Giving the Gift of Hope

Last year, Family Hope Foundation launched a program called, *Gift of Hope*. The *Gift of Hope* program is a way for groups, service clubs, businesses and other

organizations or individuals to sponsor a child's therapy scholarship. It allows a more personal connection to be made to the child and family benefitting from their generous donation. Through our scholarship selection process, we choose a child, or children, who meet the criteria of the sponsoring group, award the group's scholarship donation to the child and then make the personal connection between the group and the benefitting child.

In our Fall 2011 scholarship cycle, the Kenowa AMBUCS signed on to become our first *Gift of Hope* donor, providing a scholarship for therapy to a child with a mobility disability in their service area. Three year-old Abigail was the lucky recipient of their generosity and was able to receive a scholarship to help with her physical therapy intensive at 1 Plus 1 Therapy! We want

to thank the Kenowa AMBUCS for helping Family Hope Foundation provide more hope to kids and families.

We are excited to see our *Gift of Hope* program grow this year with support from the West Michigan Spina Bifida Organization. The WMSBO has donated \$4,000 for therapy scholarships to children living with spina bifida in West Michigan for our Spring 2012 scholarship cycle! This very generous gift will bring hope to several families in need of therapy assistance. We thank the West Michigan Spina Bifida Organization for their partnership and look forward to working together.

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"As an organization, we like to offer opportunities to help people with spina bifida reach their fullest potential and work towards becoming as independent as they possibly can. For many kids, therapy can play an invaluable role in achieving these goals. We are so excited to partner with Family Hope Foundation to provide families with the chance to help their kids succeed!"

– Emily Bush
Secretary, West Michigan Spina Bifida Organization

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For information on the *Gift of Hope* program contact Lara Kitts at (616) 780-3839 or lara.kitts@thefamilyhopefoundation.org. ✨

"AMBUCS is dedicated to creating mobility and independence for those who live with challenges every day. Partnering with such a great organization such as Family Hope Foundation, helps everyone involved achieve great miracles. Here at the Kenowa AMBUCS chapter, we take our motto of "Standing Shoulder to Shoulder" to new levels every day by continuing to provide our recipients with the best opportunities to achieve independence and mobility."

– Beth VanWieren
President-Elect, Kenowa AMBUCS



Changing Lives...

A Traditional Pastime to Most... a Small Victory to Evan

Evan Kuemin is almost five years old. He was born with feeding and sensory issues that affect every aspect of his life. He received a scholarship from Family Hope Foundation for Occupational Therapy at the Center for Childhood Development where he works with Molly Buist, OTR. Evan's mom shares her experiences and one of Evan's big milestones!

Sensory issues really have an impact on our entire family. Coping with Evan's anxiety and sensory issues on a daily basis has an effect on everyone. I don't think there is a day that we aren't stressed in some manner or have a challenge to face. Whether it be mealtimes or daily situations that others just experience without a thought, we often just hope we can get through the moment without Evan becoming anxious and overwhelmed. This is not

A real tradition, ice cream is something you assume any child will enjoy. Not Evan. It was cold...it melted...he didn't like the texture.



just hard on Evan; it's hard on the entire family.

Last summer, we were able to add vanilla ice cream to Evan's diet. A real tradition, ice cream is something you assume any child will enjoy. Not Evan. It was cold...it melted...he didn't like the texture. Attempts to eat ice cream often left him in tears and meltdowns. It's difficult to imagine a child who doesn't enjoy ice cream.

I took pictures of the first time Evan was actually successful at trying to eat an ice cream cone. It's not how you might imagine a child eating ice cream, with fists clenched, fearful of taking a bite, afraid of actually eating that ice cream. But, he was so proud of himself when he actually did it. He kept telling me, "Mom, I didn't choke."

It's been extremely discouraging as parents to try to get help and support. Often it just opens us up to being judged or shamed. People have no idea how difficult, both emotionally and financially, having a child with feeding issues can be. We have paid all of Evan's occupational therapy out-of-pocket. Each counseling session with his psychologist is out-of-network and we have a high deductible. Where many people spend

money on sports and activities for their children, we're investing in occupational therapy and counseling as a means to improve his quality of life and expand his basic life skills.

I cried when we were awarded the scholarship from Family Hope Foundation. It was as if someone besides Evan's occupational therapist actually agreed there was an issue and thought it was worth helping our son. Family Hope Foundation has not only provided us much needed financial assistance, they also gave us hope and validation. We don't feel so alone in our struggle. We feel relieved and supported. ✨

"I am excited for this family to have financial assistance in providing care for Evan. Providing him full spectrum care for his issues has been a financial burden for this family."

– Rebecca Maki, MD, Evan's pediatrician

"Evan is a wonderful, sweet little boy who has made great progress through his therapy, made possible from the scholarship from Family Hope Foundation. This type of support is of vital importance to families. Thanks to you all!!!"

– Molly Buist, OTR

Strengthening Families...



The Journey of a Father and Son

Craig Hribek is a single parent, actively involved in raising two boys, one who has autism. Ten-year old Ben received a scholarship to help

finance his music therapy. Craig shares the challenges of raising a child with a disability and the priceless benefits he has seen from the therapy Ben is receiving.

Our son Benjamin was born on Mother's Day. His big brother Christopher was excited to have a baby brother to play with. Benjamin appeared healthy and normal in every respect. He met all of his developmental markers in his first year. But then, at about 18 months of age, he just stopped talking. There was silence and it was puzzling.

Ben regressed...he would only say "Mama" ...for everything. We had our pediatrician evaluate Ben, but he didn't have the answers. It was during a family gathering in 2002 that we got our first real clue. Sitting down to Thanksgiving dinner, my brother asked why Ben wouldn't look at him. That's when the realization hit, and my heart broke right then and there. We knew there was something seriously wrong with Ben.

We took Ben for an evaluation. The doctor told us it was autism. The symptoms were classic – lack of eye contact, regressive loss of verbal ability, no interest in playing with other children, not playing with his toys in an appropriate manner, hand-flapping. We were devastated. My wife at the time took it especially hard. She blamed herself, which is common in parents who have children with special needs. There is no cure for autism and nothing that would "fix" Ben...a very hard pill to swallow.

That started a desperate and futile journey of trying to find help. We researched autism and tried just about every therapy under the sun. Of course, most weren't covered by health insurance, and it nearly bankrupted us. This placed an incredible strain on our family and our marriage.

The things normal families take for granted, like going on a summer vacation, suddenly seemed impossible. Take our children to Disney World? Forget about it! Ben would run off or get lost in the crowd. Go camping? He might escape from the tent or get lost in the woods in the middle of the night. These are fears and obstacles that are very real to the parents of special needs kids.

When you have a child with special needs, everyone in the family is affected. Our oldest son, Christopher, is often thrust into the role of caregiver. This adds a layer of pressure and responsibility...it isn't always fair. I yearn for the simple things in life that other people take for granted, like just going to the store to pick up a few groceries without worries and stress.

Having a special needs child is stressful on any family, and if your marriage isn't strong to begin with, divorce is almost a given. Sadly, our marriage eventually ended in divorce. Of course, that doesn't solve any problems; it only creates new ones that make life even harder.

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Today, Ben is a happy boy with a winning smile, a sweet disposition and a love for music and singing. He is receiving Music Therapy at the Franciscan Life Process Center and it has made a real difference in Ben's life and development. He has a great memory for details and lyrics...maybe that's one of his

special gifts. He also has perfect pitch and he never misses when he sings! Because of his therapy, Ben has become somewhat of a "leader" in his school music class...setting him apart in a positive way.

Ben went to Music Therapy for three years, but due to financial hardship this past spring we had to stop...this was heartbreaking. Receiving a scholarship from Family Hope Foundation allowed us to resume therapy, a blessing we are all grateful for. And a bonus for Ben, his therapy is just plain fun! He gets to sing, play instruments and act goofy. Ben can be a normal kid for a little while.

Ben still has challenges, but it's getting better. He can talk now, and his vocabulary is growing. He has a great sense of humor and even will tease or play little jokes on you. The best part, though, is that the eye contact has come back. Ben will now look right into my eyes and I can feel the connection with him. *This is the best gift of all.* Thank you, Family Hope Foundation! ✨

Holland Junior Welfare League – Enriching the Lives of Children

The Holland Junior Welfare League is a non-profit, charitable organization of women who raise money and perform service projects. Their mission is to enrich the lives of children in the greater Holland area.

Family Hope Foundation was the recent recipient of a \$1,500 grant through the organization. Board Chair, Lara Kitts remarks, "We are so thankful for the opportunity to increase our support in the greater Holland area. This is the second year we have been supported by the Holland Junior Welfare League. Through their remarkable generosity we awarded scholarships last year to two little boys who were given the opportunity to progress, reach new milestones and their parents were given new hope for the future. Receiving this opportunity again is truly heart warming."

Lori Leopard, President, comments, "We are proud to be able to support Family Hope Foundation's Scholarship program. We believe that all children deserve the opportunity to thrive and grow, and all families deserve the added assistance and time given to their children."

We are thankful to the Holland Junior Welfare League. They are living out their mission and working hard to strengthen the community by giving hope to families and enriching the lives of the children who live within it.



Community Support

Family Hope Foundation Selected as Finalist for 2012 Connecting with Community Awards

Family Hope Foundation is one of eight finalists for WOOD TV 8's fourth annual *Connecting with Community Awards!* WOOD TV 8 featured Family Hope Foundation's Community Partnership Program in a Connecting with Community segment with Eva Aguirre Cooper during 24 Hour News 8 this month. To see video clips of us and the other finalists, click on the community tab at www.woodtv.com. Family Hope Foundation

will also be recognized at the **Connecting with Community Awards Celebration**, where the winner will be announced, on Thursday, May 10, at the Gerald R. Ford Museum in Grand Rapids.

Thank you to all our Community Partners who work with Family Hope Foundation to create a better and stronger community for the special needs population!



Crafting for Charity



Heidi Pamerleau has been planning and hosting the "Crafting for Charity Weekend" for seven years. It began when she was trying to raise money to buy her son an assistance dog. Heidi has four children; three of them have special needs. While money may be tight at the Pamerleau house, after getting to know Heidi, I can tell you that love flows freely.

After the second event and their assistance dog, Higgins, was purchased, Heidi was convinced by many of the participants to do it again because it was so much fun! So, again and again, for five more years, Heidi has put on a very high quality, detailed two-day event. But, instead of using the money for any number of things her family could use to support three children with special needs, Heidi donates all of the proceeds to a different charity each year... and each charity chosen supports children with special needs in some way.

This year, Heidi chose Family Hope Foundation! With a theme, fabulous gift basket prizes, vendors, make-and-takes, meals for two days and many detailed touches, it was such a fun event with a room full of people wanting to give back. We are grateful to have benefitted from all of Heidi's generosity and hard work, raising \$1,738 for Family Hope Foundation! And, we are so honored to have already been asked to be the recipient of next year's event! Heidi explains, "One of the things I love about Family Hope Foundation is that the focus is not about the disability, but rather about the HOPE!" If you'd like to participate in or support next January's event, please contact Heidi at pamerleauh@yahoo.com for information. ✨

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Crazy Horse Supports Family Hope Foundation



Mark Herman and the staff at the Crazy Horse Steakhouse & Saloon do more than run a great restaurant and serve great food. They provide a tremendous service to our community by generously supporting non-profit organizations.

Each year Crazy Horse hosts a fundraising event for breast cancer, a cause that holds a special significance to Mark and his staff. They host two additional fundraisers throughout the year, donating a portion of the evening's sales and giving local non-profits an opportunity to share their work and mission with the community.

On January 10, Family Hope Foundation had the honor of being the recipient of a fundraiser at the restaurant. It was great fun to work beside the staff of the Crazy Horse, greeting and visiting with guests, bussing tables, and just enjoying the goodwill that filled the restaurant. Crazy Horse donated a total of \$2,126 to Family Hope Foundation...what an excellent way to start the year!

Herman adds, "Crazy Horse has overwhelming support from our local community and this is just another way we can give back and help individuals in need. The Crazy Horse group of employees has big hearts and I'm thankful for all of them. We love to give back. If we can make a difference in someone's life, especially a child's, that's a reward!"

We are so thankful to Mark Herman and everyone at the Crazy Horse for their generous spirit. They are a very special group of employees. Their gift to Family Hope Foundation will go directly to children with special needs...bringing hope, changing lives...strengthening families.



Investing in children and families

Find us on
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Family Hope Foundation invests in children with special needs through family support, engaging community experts, advocacy through collaboration and financial assistance to provide access to therapies.

Mission Statement:

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