“Every child is gifted. They just unwrap their packages at different times.”

I stumbled across this quote and immediately thought of the diverse population of children Family Hope Foundation is able to serve each year, how every child is gifted and valued, and how through the Gift of Ability they are given the opportunity to grow, expand, and develop. In this season of giving gifts, what better gift to give then Ability. From the ability to communicate, to the ability to move independently, Family Hope Foundation’s Scholarship Program expands a child’s range of possibilities. Here are just a few examples of how the Gift of Ability has changed lives:

 dez The gift of mobility...the joy that is felt as a child takes their first steps
 dez The gift of self-expression...being able to articulate and communicate with peers to form friendships
 dez The gift of independence...the ability to grasp an object and feed oneself at the dinner table

None of these gifts, however, would be possible without the gift of community, and the many collaborations we have nurtured over the years. We give abundant thanks to a committed Board of Directors, community volunteers, a growing number of therapy partners, corporations and businesses, and our many faithful donors. When we are able to connect these pieces, we are able to accomplish great things.

Blessings,

Jane Eppard
Executive Director

7086 8th Ave, Jenison, MI 49428  |  (616) 729-8833  |  www.familyhopefoundation.org  |  Follow us on Facebook or Instagram!
Seeing the Glass Full—A Story About Aidan

Like a little baby bird – skinny and cute – Aidan Wood said hello to the world. The only thing large on his tiny frame was his head, but since big brother had a good-sized noggin, no one was the wiser. It was not until much later that the Woods discovered that Aidan’s head circumference at birth was in the hundredth percentile for a three-year old child.

The baby years progressed with joyous bliss. Aidan slept great and rarely cried. He did not need to be held constantly; in fact, he preferred his swing. This too was an early indicator of things to come. Nearing nine months of age, the babyhood simplicity began to fade.

Delayed milestones were not near the forefront of the Wood’s minds until bronchitis became Aidan’s frequent, unwanted friend. An allergist surmised that he was likely aspirating on his formula, causing the respiratory distress. At the same time, Amy asked if his head size and disjunctive gaze had ever been discussed. Those questions led to CT scans, swallow studies, feeding therapy, thickened liquids, patching eyes, and then two eye surgeries. The Woods now knew they were in the elite club of being special needs parents.

All the while, Aidan continued to be his sweet, silly self - wearing adult shoes on his hands and feet, climbing on things, namely his brother, and lounging in laundry baskets. Early-on services and Ken-O-Sha schooling helped Aidan move forward in his learning and development. While this season of schooling had its huge victories, it also came with its harsh challenges. Aidan’s behavior became more reactive and aggressive. His ability to control his bowel movements (encopresis) caused bad episodes of soiling in his diapers. On top of that, Aidan was still non-verbal, so frustration grew as he was unable to communicate his needs.

By age ten, Aidan’s therapy services were very limited by insurance coverage. On top of this financial challenge, Aidan seemed to plateau, while simultaneously his behavior was growing more volatile at school and at home. Remembering how much progress Aidan made when he worked with René Manker, Amy conducted a search and discovered that Rene’ had started her own business, Senses in Motion. The excitement was short lived when confronted by the reality that insurance would not cover any of Aidan’s therapy. The Woods knew they could not afford to pay out of pocket.

Amy was familiar with Family Hope Foundation, as she had been serving as a volunteer for a few years at the Celebration! Cinema’s Sensory Show Time movies. Having never applied for a scholarship, they were in a position where they could benefit greatly from the support. The Woods were thrilled when Aidan was awarded a scholarship for ABM (Anat Baniel Method of Neuromovement) therapy with René. The scholarship allowed Aidan to receive the therapy he was in desperate need of. ABM therapy has been pivotal in helping Aidan with his dyspraxia (a condition affecting physical coordination). Aidan’s brain struggles to organize the information needed for his body to carry out even simple tasks. As a result, he is often frustrated, triggering emotionally reactive behavior. But with ABM therapy, he is making strides in both conceptual, sensory processing, and behavioral responses. The progress he was making through therapy was huge!

After one full year of ABM, Aidan has fewer meltdowns, aggressive behaviors are on the decline, his processing speed is growing, and the process of learning has come easier. With all the challenges being supported through therapy, Aidan’s silly personality is returning. This is definitely the best indicator of success and the most meaningful outcome for the Woods! It feels like they have their son back!

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Around age five, through Aidan’s physical and speech therapy they connected with their miracle worker, therapist, René Manker. She used some of her Feldenkrais training with Aidan in physical therapy, and his coordination and balance improved; and so did his toileting skills. However, when René left her position, they were worried. Consistency and continuity are critical to making progress. What would they do without her?

The following years brought more tests and evaluations. The diagnoses added up: dysphagia and reflux, malformation of cortical development, strabismus (which led to the eye surgeries), hypotonia and hypotonic cerebral palsy (low or diminished muscle tone), dysarthria (delayed or poor motor planning in the speech and articulation process), chronic constipation and encopresis, mood regulation disorder, and then at age seven came a new diagnosis: sensory processing disorder, which was considered the culprit for Aidan’s up and down behaviors. Thankfuly with the help of occupational therapy, Aidan gained some tools and coping skills.

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Working with Aidan Wood

Working with Aidan has been a joy! It is somewhat like unwrapping a package. You do not really know what is inside, but as you unwrap the layers, a delightful gift is revealed.

Aidan was initially referred to me by a social worker, with concerns about his behavior that included aggressiveness, regression into baby talk at times, and difficulties with focus and self-control. I am a retired Pediatric Physical Therapist who specialized in sensory processing disorders, and I was attracted to the Anat Baniel Method of Neuromovement (ABM) in 2006 after observing a child’s movements who was being treated with this method. Long story short, I ended up taking the 27-month training in order to use it with the myriad of kids I was working with. Now, I use it exclusively, seeing kids with sensory processing disorder, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, autism, learning disabilities, developmental delays, Down syndrome, dyspraxia, and apraxia. The ABM philosophy is to begin where the child is.

And, so we did. We worked to get Aidan to sense himself from the inside out, rather than the outside in, which seemed to be causing him to react aggressively in various environments. As I taught his family a technique to map his body, in a way that technical to map his body, in a way that makes him react aggressively in various environments. As I taught his family a technique to map his body, in a way that really connects with his nervous system, it was like Aidan “came online.” He became more interactive, more observant, initiating conversation more, and definitely revealed a great sense of humor—he started telling jokes!

I found Aidan to be a very sensitive boy emotionally, but also sensitive to light and sound, and very disorganized in his movements. He has a large head, and he did not quite know how to balance it as he moved around his environment. Part of the ABM work is to engage the brain in learning new ways to move the body, by sensing what you do, and then offering variations of that movement to build new neuropathways in the brain, sensing how one body part moves in relation to another. This work is based on the theory of Neuroplasticity, the idea that the brain’s network of neurons uses certain pathways with regularity, and in offering novelty and variations as simple as experiencing a sequence of movements that resemble what you do, the brain can shift to using and developing different neuropathways, which expand a person’s repertoire and choice of movement.

For example, we often work on a table that is similar to a massage table. This allows us to reduce the effects of gravity, using the table to support Aidan’s head and posture in such a way that his head is in line with his spine, as I teach him a movement sequence that relates to a function that he would like to learn such as throwing a bean bag. I break down the movements required to throw, such as moving the arm in various directions, and rotating around the spine in side-lying, and turning his head and eyes to look at or away from the hand, and shifting the weight from his pelvis into each leg. He gets to experience this movement in safe, non-threatening ways without gravity affecting his balance and execution. Throwing is complicated, with a lot of moving parts, coordination, and weight shift. I did not teach Aidan to throw; I gave him the experience of what it felt like in his body to throw. Then, we set up a target and got out the bean bags and let the brain put it all together as Aidan sat in upright and threw overhand at the target. And Voila! — success, and a huge smile from all of us! As Aidan practiced his throw, he added a new element to refine his balance and step with his opposite foot, just like a baseball pitcher uses. I did not have to teach him this, he just “listened” to his body.

As I read through my notes from the time Aidan and I began to work together in June of 2018, I am amazed at how far he has come by doing 30-minute “movement lessons” once or twice a week. I rely on his mom’s feedback to tell me what new things Aidan is doing each week after a movement lesson, and what functions they need help with. Here are some of the big changes noted in the first 8 weeks: he spontaneously used

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- the bathroom independently, better eye contact, sleeping better, even asked to go to bed—this is self-regulation.

- interacting positively in the world. He demonstrates curiosity and is willing to take some risks in trying new things such as leaping like a frog, and swimming. We have identified many sensory triggers that affect his behavior. He is good at following directions for movement and really likes

- it when I break things down into smaller steps.

- He has fewer tantrums indicating much better self-regulation abilities. He displays his kindness streak from time to time, being concerned if mom doesn’t zip her boots, and he reaches down to help her. This, from a child who could barely put on his own shoes. He used to be in constant motion in order to balance his head over his body. He can now stand still and look at you to have a short conversation. And of course, one of the highlights was helping him achieve his goals of performing a standing long jump and of throwing a ball for the Special Olympics. The pride he exhibited was breathtaking.

Aidan has learned to perceive differences, which is what ABM is all about. It has been an honor to watch him blossom as we have unwrapped his gifts. I am eternally grateful for the pioneering work of Dr. Moshe’ Feldenkrais in creating a method of somatic education upon which the Anat Baniel Method is built. Aidan has responded positively to this work and continues to refine and expand his skills and connect to the world.

René Manker
Senses in Motion, LLC

Aidan’s mom, Amy, has been a faithful volunteer at our monthly sensory movies. Said Amy of Family Hope Foundation, “This organization is amazing and I am so happy to volunteer; especially when I can help our community members connect with Family Hope Foundation for resources. Someone shared the organization with me when my family was stuck, and scared, and lonely... We finally had a lifeline to the outside world. I hope to offer that ray of hope to anyone who might need it.”

“Here are some of the big changes noted in the first 8 weeks: he spontaneously used the bathroom independently, better eye contact, sleeping better, even asked to go to bed—this is self-regulation.”
Bringing Joy to Families

The rain did not put a damper on the Family Day with the West Michigan Whitecaps. Everyone had a smile on their face as they enjoyed the game, food, special amenities and the flexibility the designated space on the Pioneer offered our guests. In the end the sun was shining. It was a great day!

What a blast we had at our YMCA family event! The Mary Free Bed YMCA offers a unique and accessible facility, with a wide range of fully accessible spaces and amenities. The environment enables people of all abilities to participate, and was a perfect location to offer families a fun-filled night. With the rock-climbing wall, designated basketball court and many other gym activities, our guests left with a smile on their face!

A big thank you to the generous sponsors who made these events free to families: Crazy Horse Steakhouse and Saloon, FlexPost, Inc., Fountain Street Church and Koele Investment Group.

“...we try to attend all of Family Hope Foundation’s family events. We are actually able to bring the entire family, because there is something for everyone! Thank you for making your events accessible and fun. A big bonus is the sense of community we feel. We look forward to connecting with the friends we have made over the years. Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

A Forever Gift
By Julie and Dan Bourbon

Since the year 2000, the C. Norman Fry Fund has been granting an annual college scholarship to a deserving recipient through the Community Foundation of the Holland/Zeeland Area (CFHZ). Norm Fry was Julie’s father and we chose to honor his memory by creating a scholarship fund in his name.

In 2018, our good friend, Matt Lepard, introduced us to Family Hope Foundation. We were impressed by the significant needs the organization addresses in our community, so Julie and I made a donation.

Then early this year, out of the blue, Julie stated that she felt Family Hope Scholarships would have a positive impact on many more lives than the scholarships our fund has traditionally granted. We contacted the CFHZ with our desire to redirect our funds and they quickly converted the benefits toward Family Hope Foundation.

2019 marked our last college scholarship grant, and we look forward to benefiting families through Family Hope Foundation in 2020 and for years to come.

Family Hope Foundation deeply appreciates the generosity of Julie and Dan Bourbon and the significant impact the C. Norman Fry Fund will have on families, giving the Gift of Ability for years to come. If you would like to consider a gift that will make a lasting impact, an endowment or estate gift will do just that. For more information, contact Jane Eppard at jane.eppard@thefamilyhopefoundation.org or 616.729.8833.
Blessed by Community
GRR Runway 5K

Family Hope Foundation was blessed to be the charity partner for this year’s GRR Runway 5K, put on by Trivium Racing. Of race day Trivium wrote, “What a beautiful morning! Thank you so much to the Gerald R. Ford International Airport for this amazing adventure. 1,200 people came out – ran – and SMASHED this course and we loved every second of it!” The generosity from the event was truly overwhelming, as Family Hope Foundation received a check for almost $16,000! The impact this gift will have on families in need is truly remarkable and Family Hope Foundation could not be more thankful! The Gerald R. Ford International Airport shared, “We are proud to support such a fantastic organization! We are so pleased to know this gift will help families right here in West Michigan!”

Volunteering...More Than We Bargained For!

We absolutely love volunteering for Family Hope Foundation! It was amazing for us to make the transition from serving on the development committee to helping out at Family Hope Foundation’s family day at the Fifth Third Ballpark. That day was more than we bargained for, but in the best possible way! We could see the joy on the faces of each and every guest. I think we had as much fun as the families on that day. What an awesome experience! We look forward to future opportunities to serve!

– Louise Kreun and Paul Harris

Holland Junior Welfare League
Supporting Local Families

Family Hope Foundation was the recipient of a generous grant from the Holland Junior Welfare League. Executive Director, Jane Eppard says, “We are so thankful for the faithful support from the Holland Junior Welfare League. This hard working, all volunteer group of women have touched a lot of lives through their generosity over the years. This year Family Hope Foundation was able to fund five scholarships in the Holland area. This is an exceptional gift!”

Partnering for Success

For the second consecutive year, Family Hope Foundation teamed up with myTEAM TRIUMPH for their Tri Del Sol race. Being selected as the charity partner of this wonderful organization is a blessing; watching the event at each stage is pure excitement! myTEAM TRIUMPH, West Michigan Chapter, invests in our community to foster inclusion for differently abled people to participate in running and triathlon sport. They are an inspiration to our community. Congratulations to all the Captains and Angels for allowing Family Hope Foundation the opportunity to benefit from this amazing experience!
Mission Statement:
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.

You may access the list of participating theatres, as well as a barcode to receive $2 OFF each ticket on Family Hope Foundation’s website!

Winter and Spring Lineup for Sensory Showtimes

| January 4  | Spies in Disguise |
| January 25 | Dolittle          |
| February 22| Sonic the Hedgehog|
| March 14   | Onward            |
| April 4    | Mulan             |
| April 11   | Peter Rabbit 2    |
| April 25   | Trolls World Tour |
| May 23     | Scoob!            |
| May 30     | SpongeBob: Sponge on the Run |
| June 27    | Soul              |