

Fall 2011

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Note from the Chair

Lara Kitts



Family Hope Foundation continues to grow and offer families new supports and services... **something we are very proud of!** We are working hard to increase our therapy scholarships, creating opportunity for children to reach their full potential. We are excited to be expanding our "Family Fun for Everyone" events, creating a supportive environment for families to thrive. **Through our mission, we are spreading hope in the community.**

We are thrilled to have created a long-term partnership with *Celebration! Cinema* to offer families ongoing fun activities where they can relax and be themselves. It is truly heartwarming to see the theatre filled with families every month, enjoying an atmosphere that accepts each person for who they are. We are grateful for *Celebration! Cinema* and their enthusiasm in offering this opportunity to families of children with special needs. **Through our mission, we are giving families opportunity.**

Thanks to the support of our generous donors, we were able to provide therapy scholarships to *twenty* children this spring...a substantial increase over what we awarded last spring! In a year and a half, we have awarded scholarships to 50 families. **Through our mission, we are strengthening families by providing much needed support.**

We are grateful to our 13 therapy providers who join us in our Community Partnership program. Through their collaboration, we are able to offer quality therapy experiences to our scholarship recipients. Together, we are helping children succeed. **Through our mission, we are investing in children and families.**

It is through community support and collaboration that we can truly make a difference. Thank you for your support!

In Hope, Lara Kitts

Creating Awareness

*Family Hope Foundation was proud to secure Grand Rapids as one of the 100 locations across America to host the event, "100 Cities. One Night for Autism." for the screening of **Wretches & Jabberers**, a powerful film that is changing perceptions of individuals with disabilities and teaching something about the growing disorder of autism.*



Tracy Thresher (left) and Larry Bissonnette (right)
Photograph courtesy of Ralph Alswang Photography

If you were fortunate enough to see this film — keep talking! Share your response to friends, family and coworkers. Keep the message alive! Our sincere thanks to Ron Van Timmeren and Celebration! Cinema for collaborating with Family Hope Foundation and for opening a larger capacity theatre to accommodate the overwhelming interest and response...330 people came to view this film in Grand Rapids!

For more information about **Wretches & Jabberers** and to purchase your copy, we encourage you to visit the website www.wretchesandjabberers.org.

Viewer's Responses...

"As the father of a son who lives with autism and Cerebral Palsy I have often wondered what the world looks like in his mind and what his experiences are. Tracy Thresher and Larry Bissonnette have helped me understand more about their world and the world of my son's experience."

"This film educated and enlightened me. It was so insightful to hear directly from Tracy and Larry about their lives, their opinions, hopes, goals and their feelings. A truly positive and moving story."

Family Hope Foundation Welcomes New Board Members

Family Hope Foundation is pleased to announce the appointments of **Michael Lichterman** and **Keshia McClain** to the Board of Directors.



Michael lives with his wife Mandy and their two children, Matthew and Elizabeth, in Wyoming. He has been practicing law in West Michigan since 2007 and owns his own law practice, Lichterman Law, PLC. He gives back to the community through many avenues, including the Southeastern Ottawa Community Foundation, Grandville Rotary, the Grand Rapids Bar Association "Street Law Initiative" pro bono effort, and the Service to Soldiers program, to name a few.

Michael is excited to serve on Family Hope Foundation's Board. *"I have supported various charities that benefit children, including those with special needs. Each was focused on a particular "need." Family Hope Foundation provides benefits that are not based on a particular "special need," but benefit all children with special needs. That is what appeals to me."*

Keshia McClain is a resident of Grand Rapids and brings a rich and diverse background to the Board. Keshia's passions range from enriching the lives of small children in her work as a preschool teacher at the Early Childhood Center in Jenison, to caring for adults with developmental disabilities at Pine Rest Mental Health.

Keshia is looking forward to her service with Family Hope Foundation. *"I love working with people who have special needs and this will be a positive way to enrich their lives and create change. I embrace diversity at all levels and aspects in the world. The opportunity to serve on the board is an honor I look forward to."*

We welcome Michael and Keshia and look forward to the many gifts and talents they will bring to our diverse and committed Board of Directors.

Helping a Family to Heal



The Parsons received a scholarship to help finance their son Waylon's therapy for Reactive Attachment

Disorder and Developmental Trauma. He receives his therapy from Kristen Kimm, LMSW, who provides outpatient mental health counseling for adoptive families. Waylon's mom shares her journey, determination and unconditional love.

My son is a good-looking kid. As a matter of fact, he's really darn cute. But, my son doesn't believe I love him. My son **can't** believe I love him. His brain isn't wired that way. Seven different homes, in two different countries, over the first six years of his life have made him dark inside.

On the surface he is charming and engaging, but other children sense the darkness. My child has no friends. He lives in a constant state of fear and anxiety. These feelings come out as anger, defiance and aggression. He can never be left alone with his sisters, even for a few minutes. The outcome is always someone getting hurt, usually his eight-year old sister, who herself has special needs. Reactive Attachment Disorder and Developmental Trauma causes him to be hyper-vigilant. When he first came to us one year ago, he slept with his eyes half open and a bell on his door.

His diagnosis has impacted our whole family, our whole lives. His hurt is our hurt. As he heals, our family heals.

As his Mother, I am his greatest source of pain. His brain tells him seven mothers before me didn't love him enough to keep him. To open him up to this unconditional love makes him too vulnerable. He lets me love him in little bits and pieces, never all in, and never for very long. His need to control every situation, all the time, won't allow him to trust I will keep him safe. He protects his heart at all costs...he can't let it be broken again.

Extreme anxiety rules his life. He is never calm. The unrelenting terror just under the surface causes him to be in a "flight or fight" mode all the time. As a parent, this is exhausting. He constantly chirps, barks, kicks, laughs, pinches, cries, pokes, clucks, screams, hits or talks. Occasionally, he just zones out and disassociates from us in an unnerving calm...his darkness is transparent. Comforting your child in distress is what any parent wants to do. Physical violence is what we receive.

As a family we have had a few really great times this year. But he becomes overwhelmed with the good feelings inside him, realizes he is letting himself be vulnerable to our love and ends up acting out. A deep sense of shame permeates his being, never being good enough, never deserving to be loved. He describes what most of us would describe as "feeling loved" as "feeling weird" to our counselor, Kristen Kimm, LMSW.



Our child is not autistic, he is not bipolar and he is not ADHD. He looks like a healthy seven-year old boy. He will start Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy, a treatment used for veterans coming back from war with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Our child has not been on a tour of duty. He's been fighting a war within himself his whole life. Medications help reduce some of the symptoms, but there is no pill to make someone love you. Ongoing, intensive counseling is what helps us attach to each other, trust each other. Our love for him is unconditional. We are his forever family.

It is through therapy our family heals. Waylon is our third adopted child; he is the only one with the diagnosis of Reactive Attachment Disorder. His diagnosis has impacted our whole family, our whole lives. His hurt is our hurt. As he heals, our family heals. Thanks to a generous scholarship from Family Hope Foundation, his healing can continue. We have hope for his future.

Thank you Family Hope Foundation, each glimmer of hope we see is brighter than the last. ✨



Holland Junior Welfare League

Holland Junior Welfare League Brings Hope to Area Families

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 \$1,000 grant through the organization. Because of this generous funding, two Holland area families received much needed therapy from Kid at Heart Therapy, one of Family Hope Foundation's Community Partners.

"As a parent of a child that has needed additional therapies, I am proud the Holland Junior Welfare League was able to give Family Hope Foundation the grant. Children that are delayed need additional therapy to be successful and thrive."

— Lori Lepard, Holland Junior Welfare League

We're thankful for organizations like the Holland Junior Welfare League who work hard to strengthen our community by giving hope and opportunity to children and families.

"Having Occupational Therapy for Nicholas has been such a blessing. He now plays with and gives hugs to his family members. He just said "Ma-ma" for the first time at two and one-half years old. We look forward to more steps. Thanks to Family Hope Foundation and the Holland Junior Welfare League, he can continue getting these vital services."

— Jim and Jennifer Reier

Guiding the Way Home

Kristen Kimm is one of Family Hope Foundation's Community Partners. Her area of focus is mental health counseling for adoptive families. She has been providing therapy and support to scholarship recipient, Waylon Parson, and his entire family. Her talent and commitment is an invaluable service in our community to families like the Parsons.



Attachment is the relationship between two people, in this specific case, between a child and his parents. Attachment starts before a child is born. It continues and becomes well established through the first year of life. This connection yields a template for all future relationships, emotional awareness, social interactions, self-acceptance and core beliefs.

Unfortunately many children suffer trauma and loss with the very people who are supposed to protect and help them grow in a healthy way. When this happens early and/or often, they do not learn to trust...first, the parent and then the world at large. They believe they must rely on themselves for their own security and safety.

Waylon is one of many children who have experienced several losses of a primary caregiver, as well as abuse and neglect. He came to the home of Julie and Kirk Parson in the spring of 2010 at the age of six. The family was dedicated to him well before his arrival in their home. We began meeting in early January to help prepare them for the challenges they could face and to have services in place the minute Waylon walked into their home.

Waylon is diagnosed with both Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) and Developmental/Complex Trauma. RAD is the inability to form a healthy relationship due to breaks in early development, which is such a critical time for children. Developmental/Complex Trauma is exposure to multiple or prolonged traumatic events and the impact this exposure has on a person's development.

To address this, therapy focuses on three areas for the Parson family: individual work for Waylon where play therapy techniques are utilized to help him share and express how he feels about the traumas of his past; family work to help all family members make the adjustment of a new person entering their family system; and specialized attachment work with Waylon and his parents. Because he does not have a healthy working template that allows him to trust, we must return to the beginning to help heal the foundation that is lacking. Time, patience and intense focus on attempts to recreate what Waylon did not receive are the keys to the family's success. Repetition, continuity and emotional attunement are also key factors in this long journey.

We are trying to make a change at Waylon's very core; this is why the work is so very long and tedious. There are gains forward...and then steps backward. Waylon and his family have made some great gains this past year. He has been able to begin to openly share the trauma he experienced. He has learned to identify the feelings that lie within him. He is beginning to allow himself to feel those feelings rather than dismiss them or pretend they do not exist. He is beginning to learn what it is like to live in a family relationship that requires give and take. He is very slowly beginning to learn that a parent can care for you and will follow through with what they say... however, we still have a long way to travel.

Family Hope Foundation has been invaluable to the Parson family. The cost to provide such intense services for a long period of time is very expensive for families when insurance will not cover any portion of this type of therapy. Your organization has provided time...hope...and healing in ways you do not realize. Thank you for this gift...to a child...to a family...to a future.

Time, patience and intense focus on attempts to recreate what Waylon did not receive are the keys to the family's success.

Choosing the Hard Road



Gramm Hulst is a five-year old boy with Spina Bifida. He received a scholarship to help fund Intensive Physical Therapy through 1 Plus 1 Therapy. His family shares their determination, dreams and long-term commitment to Gramm's success.

An expressive smile spills over Gramm's face and his dark eyes explode with excitement. He is an active five-year old boy, motivated by an unwavering curiosity for life. His days are filled with learning, exploring and brotherly-camaraderie. You would never imagine he has spina bifida.

Unforeseeably, Gramm was born with an open back. His diagnosis required immediate surgery to close the ailment. However, damage to the nerves had already taken place. The resulting paralysis would require hours of therapy every single day... beginning at just eight weeks of age.

From the beginning we were Gramm's biggest champions. We remained hopeful and were committed to providing him with every opportunity available. We understood how important it was to be his parents, his advocates, and his "therapists." Our dreams included a bright, promising and independent future...knowing this would require hard work. There were others, however, who suggested an "easier" solution. Some specialists and insurance providers recommended placing Gramm in a wheelchair — it will be easier...quicker...less work and expense.

The easy, quick and effortless solution was not the best one for our family. Desiring personal independence for Gramm, we remained stalwart in our hope he would continue walking with the assistance of ankle/foot orthotics and two single-pole canes. We began searching for a therapist who shared our committed spirit...determined to find somebody who would press, encourage and guide Gramm in his pursuit of strength and

independence. We began working with Amy Wallenburg, MPT, of 1 Plus 1 Therapy in Zeeland.

Amy assured us that through personal, ongoing physical therapy and strength building, Gramm could make significant gains toward independence.

He is now beginning to walk around home and church with only one cane—using his free hand to carry a book or hold his mom's hand. What an indescribable joy!

We could sense Amy's commitment and determination from the very beginning. That assurance revealed itself following one of Gramm's latest intensive therapy sessions. He is now beginning to walk around home and church with only one cane—using his free hand to carry a book or hold his mom's hand. What an indescribable joy!

Gramm's individual and focused therapy is a huge investment of time and finances. As a family, we carved out the time and are committed long-term.

But, our finances are limited and stretched thin. Since Gramm's birth, we have paid nearly \$16,000 out-of-pocket yearly for intensive therapy. Our resources are strained.



Gramm with brothers Hudson and Davis

It was during this challenging time Family Hope Foundation blessed Gramm with a scholarship, a financial investment in his path

toward independence. Family Hope Foundation allowed Gramm's therapy to continue for another season. The scholarship did more than relieve financial strain...it encouraged us as parents by reinforcing we are doing the very best for our son.

Family Hope Foundation reminds us the easy way is not always the answer. With hard work, perseverance and commitment, challenges can be overcome...dreams can come true! What a blessing when others are willing to walk that exciting path with you. Thank you Family Hope Foundation for "walking" with our son. ✨

On the Path to Independence

Brent and Amy Wallenburg are owners of 1 Plus 1 Therapy in Zeeland. Their innovative approach to therapy and commitment to both child and family has allowed Gramm Hulst to make amazing gains. We are grateful for their Community Partnership and their dedication to local families.



Gramm is definitely a joy to work with! He works hard, has fun and has been willing to try whatever activities and exercises we throw at him during therapy! Gramm has received three intensive sessions over the course of nine months and has made amazing progress in that time.

1 Plus 1 Therapy believes in intense, family-based, and education-focused therapy. Rather than the traditional hour each week of therapy, intensive therapy provides short-term "bursts" of therapy over the course of three to four weeks in order to make significant gains in a short amount of time.

Intensive therapy uses specialized equipment. A "cage" known as the Universal Exercise Unit with a pulley system attached is used to teach children how to more effectively use their muscles and how to isolate specific muscles or muscle groups to perform needed functions. The cage is also outfitted with a set of eight bungees, known as the "spider cage." This design allows a more dynamic, yet safe and stable environment to practice functional activities like crawling, standing, marching, and even jumping. The "spider cage" often masks work as play. Kids enjoy therapy and don't want their sessions to end!

During Gramm's sessions he receives three hours of therapy, five days a week, for three weeks. We have been focusing on hip strength and balance so he can progress from walking with two canes to using just one cane. When Gramm first started at 1 Plus 1 Therapy, he struggled to keep his balance with two canes. He often fell. One cane was virtually impossible because he did not have enough strength to keep his balance.

Gramm is now able to walk using only one cane. This is a big accomplishment and milestone! It has made Gramm more confident in our sessions because he knows the hard work earns him the reward of gaining independence. Gramm has also learned that during therapy he cannot say "I can't" but instead says "I'll try"...he typically succeeds!

We hope to continue strength training and balance activities to give him the ability to use one cane full-time. Intensive therapy is a huge financial, time and energy commitment, but having the assistance from Family Hope Foundation has made the financial commitment a little easier for the Hulst family. They can spend their time focusing on their home exercises in between intensive sessions without worrying about being able to afford the next one.

Community Support



Larry and Karen Mulder, from Holland Michigan, have been faithful supporters of Family Hope Foundation. Many children and families have benefited from their generosity and commitment to our mission.

Below are some thoughts from the Mulders on what Family Hope Foundation means to them.

We support Family Hope Foundation because: we cannot imagine...

- ✨ not being able to pay for the necessary therapy if our children and grandchildren needed it
- ✨ what it would be like to love, care for, a special needs child 24/7 year after year
- ✨ that as Christians we can easily pass by on the other side when we see and know that children and their families are suffering

And we support Family Hope Foundation because: we believe...

- ✨ that every child has God-given gifts to share with their families and communities
- ✨ that all human beings need acceptance, affirmation, and friends to enjoy
- ✨ that all children should be given the tools they need to be successful
- ✨ that Moms and Dads of special needs children need emotional and financial support from those who care, really care
- ✨ that Moms and Dads should be able to love and care for and have time for all of their children – not just the special needs child
- ✨ in investing in children and families

* * *

And we thank the board and staff of Family Hope Foundation for working hard for our children.

FALL SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS DUE

Applications for our fall therapy scholarship cycle are due on **Monday, October 3rd**. Newly revised guidelines and applications can be found on our website, www.thefamilyhopefoundation.org or by contacting Lara Kitts at **(616) 780-3839**. We will not accept applications submitted on our old form.



Matthew Rodriguez is a Family Hope Foundation donor. He lives in East Grand Rapids with his wife and three children. Matthew was interested in our family support program and asked if he could participate, meet some of the families and share his experience in our newsletter. We're grateful for his interest and support.

On July 30th, I had the privilege of attending an event sponsored by Family Hope Foundation in partnership with Celebration! Cinema. The event offered families who have children with special needs the opportunity to enjoy a new release movie, Winnie the Pooh, in an environment where they could feel comfortable and at ease.

I arrived early so I could have an opportunity to meet some of the families. I asked the Bornet family to share their expectations. "It's something the whole family can enjoy without worrying about other people in the theatre." Jodi and Bill Hosterman echoed that sentiment, "I think the thing we like the most is that our son can just be himself in the theatre. We don't have to be concerned if he is a little more fidgety, if he laughs or speaks out and makes a lot of noise."

I could tell from the smiles on the children's faces they were very excited to be at the theatre with friends and families. It was also evident the parents were relaxed and ready to enjoy the movie with their children. Family Hope Foundation did a wonderful job greeting the guests as they arrived. They offered families additional information



about the organization, as well as a Winnie the Pooh movie poster. Needless to say, the kids absolutely loved the posters!

Once inside the theatre I found that Celebration! Cinema created a disability-friendly environment by increasing the lighting and lowering the sound. During the film, the kids just got to be kids...they laughed out loud, talked to each other, and some ran around the theatre. It was obvious the parents didn't mind and everyone was relaxed and just enjoyed the family time together.

After the movie, I had the pleasure of meeting Kiri and Alexei Salazar. When I asked if Family Hope Foundation had met their needs today, Kiri said, "Well, I'd say they exceeded our needs today! It's really hard to summarize an experience that means tradition. Going to the movies when I was a child was a great tradition and to do that now has not been easy. So, if you get one chance to go to the movies, you take it. It's really nice to just be part of this normal part of life."

For these families the experience was more than going to the movies on a Saturday morning. It was a healthy social experience for the children and the parents...for the entire family. While it may be easy for some to take the little things in life for granted, like going to the movies, these families did anything but that.

Family Hope Foundation and Celebration! Cinema have created something together that is more than just strangers watching a film together. It is a much deeper social experience, a place where families that understand each other's challenges can come together and bond. ✨



Fall and Winter Movie Lineup

Dolphin Tale – Saturday, September 24
(\$5 per ticket)

Shrek Forever After – Saturday, October 29
(\$3.50 per ticket and 12 and under are FREE)

The Muppets – Saturday, November 26
(\$5 per ticket)

Alvin & the Chipmunks: Chipwrecked –
Friday, December 30 (\$5 per ticket)

ALL MOVIE TIMES ARE 10:00 AM
first come, first served seating

**Celebration! Cinema North – 2121
Celebration Drive, NE, Grand Rapids**

"Celebration! Cinema is proud to offer big screen movies to our friends associated with Family Hope Foundation. Getting out of the house to enjoy a movie on the big screen is something everyone needs to do from time to time. Have fun and enjoy the show!"

Ron Van Timmeren
VP, Programming, Celebration! Cinema

Investing in children and families

Find us on
Facebook!



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:

7086 8th Avenue
Jenison, MI 49428

