

kids alive

a newsletter for supporters
and participating families



The Hope Tree

The Hope Tree has become something of an institution at Kids Alive. The name, also a title of a book by Laura Numeroff and Wendy S. Harpham, inspired Gail Opsahl, our guest art therapist at the December and April sessions of Kids Alive, to consider how we could construct our own tree and display our own hopes.

our mission

To serve children ages 6 to 16 by helping them adapt to the trauma of a parent's diagnosis of cancer.

A Look Inside

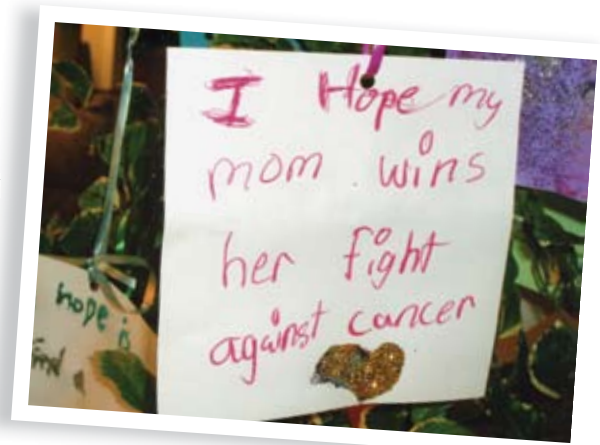
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The Hope Tree After the Hopes Are Hung On It

Gail brought an artificial tree and hope ornaments are made and hung on the tree. Children identify their hopes in many ways: poems, writings, drawings, symbols of different kinds. These subsequently become an art project that when completed are tied on the tree with colored ribbon. Most hopes are related to cancer, and to family members. Some are of a more general nature, e.g. peace on earth.

As each art session rolls around, children talk about seasons of the year, old leaves being replaced with new ones, old hopes being replaced with new ones. The old hopes are placed beneath the tree, and children are free to take them or leave them.

The Hope Tree has been used as a decorative piece in some sessions, at Kids Alive family dinners, and has even been transported to a neighboring city to be part of a fund-raiser. Meanwhile, it sits in a conference room, awaiting the next session when it will again be decorated with the hopes of children.



An Example of the Individual Hopes of the Children

Changes in the Family

Kids Alive meeting in January and February have dealt with changes in the family.



The January group begins after check in with a big circle and a ball of string. The ball is tossed to each individual in the circle, until all are connected. Then people take a couple of steps forward or backward and look at how the configuration changes. This is a graphic representation of how things change when people get further apart or closer together. It is interesting to see the children's reactions as they visually see what we talk about.

After this the group is divided into ages of 6–10 and 11–16. The older group does family sculpting which is a process of depicting families. A child volunteers to show the group his family. They select other children and volunteers to represent the members of their family, including family pets and whoever else the child wants to be in the family. Issues such as who is close to who, where is cancer in the family, feelings of different family members are all shown in this process. This is a very meaningful activity for all those involved.



The younger children go into a separate room and divide into small groups. They are given a scenario of different family situations and are able to choose puppets to represent the characters in the story they are about to tell. This is usually a pretty lively activity dealing with issues such as the shifting of attention away from a child back to a parent who is ill, how they continue to play and have fun even though Mom or Dad has cancer and other situations commonly faced by children of parents with cancer.



Welcome

Dr. Lorraine Hart has joined the administrative staff of Kids Alive! Welcome, Lorrie.

Dr. Hart is a licensed psychologist in private practice in the Denver area. She has worked extensively with children and families, and brings enthusiasm and creativity to our sessions.

In February, there was a guided discussion of 4 or 5 different questions pertaining to their experiences. These questions included:

- How have things changed in your family since Mom or Dad developed cancer?
- How do you know when Mom or Dad don't feel well?
- What are your greatest fears?
- Who are your allies?
- What do you do to help yourself when you feel anxious or afraid?

The discussion generates many different responses and ideas from the children.

The second part of the session has to do with dealing with anger that is bound to come up for a child who has a parent with cancer. Different scenarios are given to the children and they develop a skit around the story. All the stories require that they come up with ways to deal with their anger.





Sinjin Carey

Volunteer from 2004–2008



Sinjin's mother, Michele Carey, was Director of Oncology at Porter Adventist Hospital for over 13 years. One day, when Sinjin was 14, he and his mother came to a Kids Alive meeting. Shortly after that he talked to us about wanting to be a volunteer. He was an incredibly popular volunteer because he was always so much fun to be with, yet so compassionate and understanding when the children were going through difficult times.

He goes on to say, "My favorite memories of Kids Alive happened at Snow Mountain Ranch. It is a great place to really connect with the kids. I had the best job in the entire world. It was my job to just have fun with them all weekend long. I swam, climbed and ate with them. It was great for both me and the kids to forget about home life and just have fun."

Sinjin was a volunteer from age 14 to age 18 when he left for college. "Kids Alive taught me how to recognize children's sensitivities and how to help them overcome problems out of their control." He is now at the University of Oregon studying biochemistry.

THANK YOU, Sinjin for who you are, all your help, and your wonderful sensitivity to the children. Best Wishes to you in college.

Plans for a Kids Alive Reunion

This past year Madelyn and Jeanne were invited to a 10 year celebration of a parent who had her children in Kids Alive when she was going through treatment. What an amazing experience to see these children now 10 years later so grown up and doing so well. We began to think, what if we did this on a bigger scale; after all Kids Alive is in its 14th year. Thus, began talk of attempting to have a reunion of as many of the families we can contact. So, in the summer of 2010, we are going to try to gather as many families as we can for a gala reunion. This is very much still in the talking and planning stages, but stay tuned to subsequent newsletters for more details as they emerge.

Our poem about Hope

Kids Alive! is full of Hope

Hope is feeling warm and fuzzy inside,
Have hope because you are feeling scared,
Hope is feeling like flowers blooming in spring,
Feeling happy and faithful is Hope!

Kids Alive! is full of Hope

Hope is wishing for long-lasting friendship,
Hope is wishing for better medicine,
Hope is wishing for our parents getting better,
Wishing for a good life is Hope!

Kids Alive! is full of Hope

Hope is helping us know what's happening,
Hope is helping us believe it's going to be ok,
Hope is helping us express our emotions,
Helping us feel connected and not alone is Hope!

Kids Alive! is full of Hope

Hope is learning that it is ok to have Hope,
Hope is learning that it sometimes changes,
Hope is learning that you never lose it,
Learning that cancer can go away is Hope!

Kids Alive! is full of faith,

Kids Alive! is full of laughter and fun,
Kids Alive! is full of happiness,
Kids Alive! is full of life, compassion and sharing.
We are Kids Alive! Kids Alive! is full of Hope

—written by Kids Alive participants
at one of the monthly meetings

our goals

- To provide a safe, helpful environment where children are encouraged to express their feelings
- To create a place for a child to be a child; to experience fun, support and continuity of life, apart from the illness
- To improve relations between cancer patients and their children, thereby reducing any guilt and anxiety in children
- To help parents understand their children's adaptive behavior as a reaction to illness

every
gift
helps

Fundraising News

Since the printing of our first newsletter in August of 2008, approximately \$4,500 have come in gifts and donations. This is so helpful to sustain Kids Alive, especially in these economic times. We currently have 32 children and more parents are making applications. It is difficult to understand the absolute need for a program such as this.

Thank you to all of you who have been so generous. Every gift helps.

Plans for the Remainder of the Year

March 7 and 8 will be our annual trip to Snow Mountain Ranch – always so much fun and enjoyment. April 4, Gail Opsahl, art therapist, returns to do her magic with the children. This month we write a poem or a story about Kids Alive and make new hopes for the Hope Tree. May 2, Susan Hess, music therapist, comes to our group. This is such a helpful session. When she comes she brings many different instruments to help express the feeling in music that sometimes just cannot be put to words. There is always happy, sad, mad, plus others that are commonly experienced by children who have a parent with cancer. Then the year winds up on June 6, with the Family Hero's Journey.

We take new children all year, so if you know of any who would like to participate in Kids Alive, have the parents call Jeanne Currey at 303 778 5832 or Madelyn Case at 303 985 4788.

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