

## Kids Camp, a look back as we grow forward

As the saying goes, time flies. Let's put on your time-traveling hat and see if you remember when these events occurred: Ruth Bader Ginsburg's swearing in as US Supreme Court Justice, Tom Hank's Best Actor Oscar win for "Forrest Gump," Brazil's World Cup win in the US and Optimal Hospice Foundation's first Kids Camp?

Well, if you are a student of time, you remember that all those events took place in 1994. And of those, only one has occurred each year from 1994 to this year: Optimal Hospice Foundation's Kids Camp.

It wasn't called Kids Camp in 1994; it began as Rainbow Retreat. And as time went on, that one camp session became many. Kid's Camp in Bakersfield is in its 23rd year. Fresno is in its 12th year, and the most recent addition, NorCal, is in its second year. And new this year, we are adding a one-day camp for 6 to 9 year olds in Bakersfield, a first for this program.

It is said the only thing that doesn't change is change itself. And for a program such as Optimal Hospice Foundation Kids Camp, that is a good thing. Society changes, resources change, and the way people confront and deal with death and grief changes; therefore

the camp has continued to evolve. New ideas that can help children cope with their grief are continually added to the camp curriculum.

Scott Haner, Camp Director for all three Kids Camps (yes, all three!) has been around the camps since 1996 and took over as director in 2002. When he started, there was one camp, one session and perhaps 20 kids. Now the

Foundation hosts five sessions of camps in three locations that are packed to capacity. He sees the growth as a positive indicator.

Scott said, "The need has always been there, but the key was getting the word out and having all the pieces line up. I see the growth as a result of a year-round effort at marketing and talking about death, not hiding from it."

As for adding camps in other locations over the years, Scott sees it as a challenge to be creative. The facilities and personnel change a bit by location.

He said, "For the new NorCal camp, I run a program similar to Bakersfield and Fresno, but we changed it up. I mold the activities to the camp staff's strengths. We had a big camp, and it was successful."



*Camp Director Scott Haner gets into the fun.*

On a personal level, Scott loves what he does. "I get to use my degree! I did my Master's thesis on this camp," he exclaimed. "I love to get kids fired up in the morning and at night." And Scott checks to see what the kids think as well. He said, "I always try to find a camper who didn't have a good time, and I can say that I have never found a camper who didn't have fun."

### Many forms of care and support

Kids Camp functions on two complementary ideals – having fun/ being a kid and identifying coping skills that can be used the rest of their lives. For some children Kids Camp is the first rung on the ladder of their grief journey.

Our camp nurse cares for bumps and bruises, and our grief counselors help the kids give their pain a voice.

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*Camp Director Scott Haner*

## Camp, continued from page 1

"I'm the Fresno camp nurse," says Debbie Brazie (in her tenth year in that role) "and I deal with the pain that comes from kids having fun: slivers, bug bites, the occasional bump or cut. I'll even handle homesickness."

Debbie has seen growth as well. She remarked, "My first five or six years here, we were lucky to have 20 kids, even though we had more sign up. Family members would forget or have trouble getting to camp. The Foundation has done a great job improving that area. Last year we had a bus to help with transportation. We are happy to see these improvements, because we want these kids to experience the camp."

And speaking of having kids experience it, Debbie asked her own children, two boys now in their 20s, to come help out. That was 10 years ago, and they have been at almost every camp since. Debbie said, "They just love being camp counselors and helping run the activities. It's like a family camp. We look forward to it. I'm proud that they see what it does for the kids."

### Giving our pain a voice

Bereavement Counselor Cindy Stone said, "I'm in my ninth or tenth year, so I've been involved long enough to see change and growth. We have evolved over the years to encompass all the components of a grief camp. Camp is tons of fun, but we also incorporate the

grief side of the house. We work with coping skills and tell the kids that it is ok to have fun, but also ok to give your grief a voice. We try to reach a balance with friendships and memories."

Cindy does a lot of her work through the local schools. Those relationships along with the camp leadership efforts, she says, have increased the referrals by social workers and spiritual care leaders, which results in full camps. "I think we are unparalleled in our communities in supporting our kids," said Cindy.

As for her personally, she said, "The successes reaffirm my commitment to the mission of Kids Camp. At the end of the week I am revitalized. It is my favorite week of the year."

### They put the fun in funding

Kids Camps are free to the families and kids who attend, but that doesn't mean there isn't a cost to provide the camps each year. That's where the support from outside organizations and individual contributions come into play.

One long-time supporter is the Children's Advocates Resource Endowment (C.A.R.E.) of Bakersfield. Every year since 2007, they have contributed thousands of dollars in support of the Bakersfield Kids Camp.



When the first sponsorship request came it touched C.A.R.E. President Jim Luff at a personal level. Jim said, "In 1986 I lost my wife and became a single parent raising a child. We did not have a program like this. People who have not been in this situation don't realize the many impacts it has on a child."

Jim decided to attend the camp to see if it was worthy of the support. "I wanted to see how the camp was run and if there was a benefit. And ever since that first visit we have supported Kids Camp. It's the only program of its type, and it fulfills a need in our community."

Jim says it is easy to see the benefits. "You could tell that the kids formed lifetime friendships. It is easy for us to continue the participation. Many



*Bereavement Counselor Cindy Stone helps campers deal with their grief through activities and whenever they need support.*

of these children would never have the funds for the professional grief counseling that they need," said Jim. "We go and eat lunch with the kids each year. It was enlightening for us, as we saw that the program is so beneficial to the kids. The kids at the camp bonded with the other kids, saying 'we are in this together.' The peer-to-peer counseling is fantastic."

### Making a difference

What do the campers say about Kids Camp? This message from Rita Lorenz from Optimal Hospice in Bakersfield sums it up pretty well. Rita wrote in part, "Last night a friend told me that her two grandchildren went to Kids Camp this past year as they were having a tough time with their mom's sudden death. She asked them if they enjoyed it, and they went on and on about the great food, the great people and how much fun they had. She asked them what message, if any, they brought back with them from the camp. They told her 'we learned it was okay to be sad and cry and talk about our feelings and talk about our mom, and that it was also okay to laugh and have fun, that life goes on and we have to continue to live.'"

Optimal Hospice Foundation Executive Director Cherie Shoemake said, "We are proud of how far our Kids Camps have come. It says a lot about a program to have so many people continue to be involved year after year." Thanks to the hard work and support of so many, Kids Camp has and will continue to make a difference in the lives of kids dealing with a loss.



*Camp Nurse Debbie Brazie helps a camper take aim.*



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# Kids Camp 2016 —

## *Refer a child, Become a sponsor*

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*Thank you to our generous **Optimal Employee Giving Campaign** donors who are included in this list. Together they gave more than \$58,500.*

If you know a child who has suffered the loss of a loved one in the recent past, you've probably struggled with how to provide comfort to him or her. Optimal Hospice Foundation can help.

The Foundation is now accepting referrals for Kids Camp 2016, to be held this summer in Bakersfield, Fresno and Livermore.

This 2½ day overnight camp provides kids a safe environment to find healing and peace through games, activities and common fellowship with each other. Bereavement counselors are on site to work with children who may need one-on-one time and attention. The camp is open to any child in the community even if their loved one didn't utilize hospice services.

**Thanks to the generous support of businesses and individuals, the Foundation provides this service at no cost to campers.**

- The 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual **Bakersfield Kids Camp** will be at Gergen Ranch: Ages 9 to 12: Sunday, July 31 – Tuesday, August 2  
Ages 12 to 16: Wednesday, August 3 – Friday, August 5  
Ages 6 to 9: Saturday, July 30 (one day)
- The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual **Fresno Kids Camp** will take place July 8–10 at Camp Oakhurst for ages 9 to 12.
- Our 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual **NorCal Kids Camp** for ages 9 to 12, hosted by The Taylor Family Foundation, will be August 19–21 at TTFF at Camp Arroyo in Livermore.

If you would like to refer a child or sponsor a camper, contact your local Foundation office (see back page for contact information). More information and referral forms are available at [OptimalHospiceFoundation.com](http://OptimalHospiceFoundation.com) and [Facebook.com/OptimalHospiceFoundation](https://Facebook.com/OptimalHospiceFoundation).



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## FOUNDATION LOCATIONS

### Foundation Office

1315 Boughton Drive  
Bakersfield, CA 93308  
(661) 716-8000

### Community Offices

#### Bakersfield

1675 Chester Avenue, #401  
Bakersfield, CA 93301  
(661) 716-8000

#### Kern River Valley

6504 Lake Isabella Blvd, #E  
Lake Isabella, CA 93240  
(760) 379-5038

#### Bay Area

3375 Scott Blvd, #410  
Santa Clara, CA 95054  
(408) 207-9220

#### Fresno

6780 North West Avenue, #101  
Fresno, CA 93711  
(559) 320-8000

#### Long Beach

3200 East 19th Street  
Long Beach, CA 90755  
(562) 494-7687

#### Modesto

1101 Sylvan Avenue, #B-10  
Modesto, CA 95350  
(209) 338-9000

#### Stockton

3461 Brookside Road, #A2  
Stockton, CA 95219  
(209) 670-8040

#### Visalia

2439 West Whitendale Avenue, #B  
Visalia, CA 93277  
(559) 334-5120



1315 Boughton Drive  
Bakersfield, CA 93308  
(661) 716-8000

*The Hospice Journey is published by Optimal Hospice Foundation*

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## Support groups available through Optimal Hospice Care

These groups are open to the public and offered free of charge.

### Bakersfield

Tuesdays, 10–11:30 a.m.  
First United Methodist Church  
4600 Stockdale Hwy., Room 4

Thursdays, 6–7:30 p.m.  
First United Methodist Church  
4600 Stockdale Hwy., Room 4

#### *Kid's Grief Connection*

Call (661) 371-2102 for info.

### Fresno

Mondays, 6–7:30 p.m.  
Sunrise of Fresno  
7444 N. Cedar Ave.

### Lake Isabella

Wednesdays, 1–2:30 p.m.  
Optimal Hospice Care Office  
6504 Lake Isabella Blvd., Ste. E

### Long Beach

Group Sessions Offered  
Huntington Terrace Assisted  
Living  
18800 Florida Street  
Huntington Beach  
Call (562) 494-7687 for info.

### Madera

Wednesdays  
Cedar Creek Senior Living  
Center  
500 N. Westbury Blvd.  
Call (559) 320-4000 for info.

### Modesto

Last Thursday, 6–7:30 p.m.  
Optimal Hospice Care  
1101 Sylvan Ave., Ste. B-10

#### *Kid's Grief Connection*

Call (209) 338-3000 or Stockton  
(209) 670-8000 for info.

### Porterville

2nd & 4th Thursday  
10:30 a.m.–Noon  
Sierra Hills Retirement Center  
2500 West Henderson

### Santa Clara

Optimal Hospice Care  
3372 Scott Blvd., Ste. 410  
Call for info: (408) 207-9222

### Stockton

Tuesdays, 6–7:30 p.m.  
Optimal Hospice Care  
3461 Brookside Road, Ste. A2

### Taft

Thursdays, 1–2:30 p.m.  
Chevron Valley Credit Union  
1092 W. Kern St.  
Community Room, outside  
entrance

### Tehachapi

Tuesdays, 1:30–3 p.m.  
Tehachapi Senior Citizens Center  
500 East F St.

### Visalia

2nd & 4th Tuesday  
3–4:30 p.m.  
Optimal Hospice Care  
2439 W. Whitendale Ave., Ste. B