

## Junior counselors bridging the age gap

Since 1993 Optimal Hospice Foundation Kids Camp has helped hundreds of children who are grieving the death of someone they love. Kids Camp provides children an opportunity to connect with others who are grieving, learn coping skills and enjoy traditional camping activities, in an atmosphere where both staff and campers understand their special needs.

The camps are led by staff and volunteers who make a big difference in the lives of attendees. One of the volunteer positions, junior counselors, is filled by young adults who attended Kids Camp during their time of need.

Junior counselors bridge the age gap between the camp counselors and attendees. "Often children feel more comfortable talking to someone closer to their age," said Optimal Hospice Foundation Director and Kids Camp Administrator Cherie Shoemake. "The junior counselors are kids who have aged out of the camps but feel the

longing to return and give back."

Junior Counselor Sabrina Quevedo says that she is excited to go back to the Bakersfield camps again this year. "It's so rewarding seeing campers faces change from grouchy when they arrive to massive smiles," said Sabrina. "I really like connecting with the younger kids at the one-day camp. They don't know how much fun they are going to have."

Sabrina's camp experience started when she was just 15 years old. She didn't want to go to camp. "The camp helped me and my siblings. After that experience you don't feel alone. I made friends that weekend that I still have now," said Sabrina.

The following year Sabrina returned as a junior counselor. "Camp is such a wonderful thing. I get to help kids who are feeling awkward and sad to feel welcome and safe and to know they are not alone," said Sabrina.

"Being a junior counselor is a rewarding experience," she added. "I like doing the activities with the kids, especially when they go from 'do we have to do this' to 'do we have to stop?'"



*Junior Counselor Georgiana showing the kids how it is done in the Gaga Pit.*

Fresno Camp Junior Counselor Georgiana Rodriguez attended camp twice before returning as a junior counselor.

"I went to camp when my grandma passed away. My brother was acting out with bad behavior and his school recommended Kids Camp. Mom sent all seven of us," said Georgiana. "I thought where is she sending us? By the second day smiles had replaced our first day's upset faces."

Two years later their family experienced another loss. This time Georgiana was looking forward to camp. "I knew that I was not the only one suffering, that it would be OK to cry, be sad and still have fun," said Georgiana. "I saw that the junior counselors could be a helper and encourage the younger kids. I wanted to go back and do that too."

And Georgiana did. She (and two of her siblings) returned as a junior



*Junior Counselor Sabrina joining the color water fight fun.*

## Junior counselors, continued from page 1

counselor where she says that she has the opportunity to get kids to open up. "I enjoy being in a roll as someone the campers can talk to in addition to counselors. It is rewarding knowing we were able to help," said Georgiana.

"If you are willing to be a role model, you can do it. Step up. Being a junior counselor gives you the opportunity to explore and do things you haven't done before. It's fun and eye opening. You'll learn about yourself and this grieving process," said Georgiana. "Finding that one kid who will open up after you share your story ... It helps you and the camper."

What would Georgiana say to a parent who was considering sending their child to camp? "Kids Camp is time for your kids to benefit from fun and talk. It's a good program, and I am thankful that my family participated. You learn about grief and that it is OK to feel what we are feeling and still have fun," Georgiana shared.

NORCAL Junior Counselor Tyler Jack says that he enjoys being a junior counselor even more than being a camper because he gets to help others have fun.

Camp Director Cherie recalls that Tyler arrived at camp on Friday unhappy that he had to be there, but by Sunday morning he was asking about coming back as a junior counselor.

"I'm not a fan of sitting down and talking about feelings, and that was my expectation for camp. I soon realized that you have moments of a little bit of a serious talk, but it was integrated into what you were doing. It was easy to have a talk and move on, not a big deal," said Tyler.

So, what was the moment that changed Tyler's outlook? He doesn't recall one specific thing, but he shared one experience. "It was movie night and I was not feeling 100%. I went outside to take a break and a counselor was right there to check on me, to see if they

could help. There was that feeling of support, that you can be you and feel safe being you. I'm glad to know that as a junior counselor I can make sure that others can have those experiences," shared Tyler.

One of the rewarding experiences being a junior counselor for Tyler was in helping at the zipline. "One girl didn't want to do the zipline. She was not fond of heights. We encouraged her to climb the pole and she ended up doing it. She was the happiest of the campers who did the zipline that day. I was glad to be able to help her make strides in her mood and outlook," said Tyler.

Tyler says that "Everyone fits in at camp. The experience is more than worth it. You focus on the stuff but get to be a kid and have fun. And you can



*Junior Counselor Tyler enjoying first night activities with the campers.*

make friendships that last. I'm happy to continue to be a part of that."

Thanks to the generous hearts of our junior counselors and other staff and volunteers, the Foundation is able to serve close to 200 campers every year.

## The Foundation is now accepting referrals for Kids Camp 2019!

Kids Camp is a 2½ day overnight camp (and one-day camp for younger kids) that 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 provided free of charge, thanks to our generous sponsors, and is open to any child in the community even if their loved one didn't utilize hospice services.

To refer a child or sponsor a camper, contact your local Foundation office (listed on the last page). Referral forms may be submitted year round.

### 26th Annual Bakersfield Kids Camp

**Sunday, July 28 – Tuesday, July 30**  
at Gergen Ski Ranch for ages 9 to 12

**Wednesday, July 31 – Friday, August 2**  
at Gergen Ski Ranch for ages 12 to 16

**Saturday, July 27** (one day)  
at Madison Grove Park for ages 6 to 9

### 15th Annual Fresno Kids Camp

**Friday, July 12 – Sunday, July 14**  
at Camp Oakhurst for ages 9 to 16

**Saturday, July 20** (one day)  
at Dry Creek Park in Clovis for ages 6 to 9

### 5th Annual NorCal Kids Camp

hosted by The Taylor Family Foundation  
**Friday, August 16 – Sunday, August 18**  
at TTFF at Camp Arroyo  
in Livermore  
for ages 9 to 16



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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Sponsorship & Registration Forms  
available at [OptimalHospiceFoundation.com](http://OptimalHospiceFoundation.com)

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Amanda Tymn  
Dolores Uranday  
Lisa Uranday  
Dulce Uribe Chavez  
Anna Marie Valadez-Stolte  
Kim Van De Venter  
Sherrie Van Matre



OPTIMAL CARES  
*Halloween Car Show*  
*We would like to thank the following*

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**SAVE THE DATE: Saturday, October 26, 2019**

The Bakersfield RV Resort/Crest Bar & Grill | 5025 Wible Road, Bakersfield

Pete & Edith Vander Meulen  
Loretta Vanhove  
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Lloyd Vaught  
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Villa Vejvoda  
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Ashley Williams  
Darlene Williams  
Ellaine Williams  
Julie Williams  
Mark Williams  
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Michael & Lisa Witthans  
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Wonderful Giving  
Wayne & Shirley Wood  
Claudia Woodbury  
Jennifer Woodmansee  
Judi Woods  
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Elizabeth Wright  
Leah Yaeger  
Rosa Yanez Espinoza  
Mee Yang  
Bonaire Yopez  
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Willie Young  
Maria Zavala  
Anissa Zepeda  
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## FOUNDATION LOCATIONS

### FOUNDATION OFFICE

1227 Chester Avenue  
Bakersfield, CA 93301  
661.716-8000

### COMMUNITY OFFICES

#### Bakersfield

1675 Chester Avenue, #401  
Bakersfield, CA 93301  
661.716.4000

#### Kern River Valley

6504 Lake Isabella Blvd, #E  
Lake Isabella, CA 93240  
760.379.5038

#### Fresno

6780 North West Avenue, #101  
Fresno, CA 93711  
559.320.8000

#### Lancaster

44151 15th Street West, #201  
Lancaster, CA 93534  
661.674.3301

#### Long Beach

5000 East Spring Street #525  
Long Beach, CA 90815  
562.735.8687

#### Modesto

1101 Sylvan Avenue, # B-10  
Modesto, CA 95350  
209.338.9000

#### Stockton

2800 West March Lane #110  
Stockton, CA 95219  
209.670.8040

#### Visalia

2439 West Whitendale Ave., #B  
Visalia, CA 93277  
559.334.5120

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1227 Chester Avenue  
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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.**

**Thursdays 6–7:30 p.m.**

First United Methodist Church  
4600 Stockdale Hwy., Room 4  
(661) 716-4000

*Counseling available en Español*

### FRESNO

**Mondays 3–4:30 p.m.**

Fairwinds – Woodward Park  
9525 Ft. Washington Rd.  
(559) 320-4000

*Counseling available en Español*

### HUNTINGTON BEACH

**Group Sessions Offered**

Call for information

Huntington Terrace Assisted Living  
18800 Florida St.  
(562) 494-7687

### LAKE ISABELLA

**Thursdays 1–2:30 p.m.**

Optimal Hospice Care Office  
6504 Lake Isabella Blvd., Ste. E  
(760) 379-5038

### LANCASTER

**Counseling available**

Call for information

Optimal Hospice Care  
44151 15th Street, Space 201  
(661) 674-3300

### MADERA

**1st & 3rd Wednesdays 2–3:30 p.m.**

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

**2nd & 4th Wednesdays 3–4:30 p.m.**

*Counseling en Español*  
Madera Rehabilitation & Nursing  
517 South A St.  
(559) 320-4000

### MODESTO

**Group Sessions Offered**

Call for information  
Optimal Hospice Care  
1101 Sylvan Ave., Ste. B-10  
(209) 338-3000

### PORTERVILLE

**2nd & 4th Thursdays 2–3:30 p.m.**

Sierra Hills Retirement Center  
2500 West Henderson Ave.  
(559) 741-7220

*Counseling available en Español*

### SEAL BEACH

**Group Sessions Offered**

Call for information  
Redeemer Lutheran Church  
of Leisure World  
13560 Saint Andrews Dr.  
(562) 494-7687

### STOCKTON

**Group Sessions Offered**

Call for information

Optimal Hospice Care  
3461 Brookside Road, Ste. A2  
(209) 670-8000

### TAFT

**1st & 3rd Wednesdays 1–2:30 p.m.**

First Baptist Church  
220 North St.  
Boardroom  
(661) 716-4000

### TEHACHAPI

**Tuesdays 1:30–3 p.m.**

Tehachapi Senior Citizens Center  
500 East F St.  
(888) 597-6115

### VISALIA

**2nd & 4th Tuesdays 3–4:30 p.m.**

Prestige Assisted Living at Visalia  
3120 W. Caldwell Ave.  
(559) 741-7220

*Counseling available en Español*

### YOUTH GRIEF SUPPORT

Bakersfield, Fresno, Modesto,  
Stockton and Visalia

Call area numbers  
for details.



Stay up to date on events,  
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