

## A Well Deserved Honor to our Volunteer By: Vicky Wittman, Director, Camp HOPE

The moment I saw that nominations opened for the Janet Berry Volunteer of The Year Award, one person in particular immediately came to mind. I remember meeting this person two years ago, when I first attended Camp HOPE as a new volunteer counselor. The first night, I didn't know what to expect, but as I listened to this person share his experiences with grief and how volunteering at Camp HOPE had given those losses meaning, I felt an immediate belonging. It was apparent this person was very special and I was lucky to have him as my mentor. Over that weekend and each Camp since, I've witnessed this person set his own pain aside to listen, offer support and help bring smiles back to countless young faces. Because of his kindness, character and dedication to helping others, it was an easy choice to nominate Chad Kazel for the 2020 Janet Berry Volunteer of The Year Award. And of course, he won! Congratulations Chad and thank you for everything you do for the families of Camp HOPE! You are so deserving of this honor and recognition.

A few words from Chad:  
 "My volunteer world started with Camp HOPE three years ago. This was right after I lost a close friend to suicide. My initial reason for wanting to volunteer at Camp was to better understand the concepts of grief and mental health. I wanted to educate myself in order to help in any way I could.

I previously heard about Camp HOPE and decided to look into volunteering. When I contacted



Chad Kazel with camper

Camp HOPE I was greeted with open arms! Words cannot explain how amazing the atmosphere of Camp HOPE is. I was surrounded by the most wonderful people I've ever met from the second I arrived. The volunteers and campers that make up Camp HOPE come from every background you could imagine. No matter what you're going through, someone there has gone through it, too. It was an overwhelming feeling of belonging that I've never experienced before. You truly realize you're not alone.

As mentioned earlier, I started volunteering at Camp HOPE to educate myself on how to help others. What I didn't realize was how much Camp HOPE would help change my life in such a positive way. Camp HOPE is judgment free and fosters any conversation you may want to have. This allowed me to open up about my own anxiety and depression and allowed me to get the help I needed. Camp HOPE taught me how to enjoy life again.

Camp HOPE has also connected me with so many wonderful people who've introduced me to multiple great organizations where I've since been able to volunteer at. These organizations include Hope's House in Green Bay, The Center for Grieving Children and the Runaway Program—both located at the Boys & Girls Club in Menasha, and the Center for Suicide Awareness in Kaukauna.

I can honestly say that Camp HOPE has saved my life. I'll never be able to repay what Camp HOPE has given me. I'm just glad I'm able to be a part of it!"  
 -Chad Kazel

## Things I know because of Mom:

"Always snuggle babies, whenever and wherever you can. Bread is best when it's warm. Traveling makes you a smarter and better person. It's perfectly okay to call someone you love 'Lil Bugger' or 'Bootsie'. Treat your son or daughter in law well and you make your child happy. People in all walks of life deserve your respect. Reading is the best teacher. There is always time for your child. Compassion for people who are suffering, locally or far away. How loved a smile of welcome makes a person feel."



Becky Kraemer Loy and Louise Kraemer



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*A camp experience for children and their families after the death of a loved one*

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## WINTER 2021

*Please help us to continue providing free services to grieving children and their families. Remember Camp HOPE with your giving. We are a non-profit, 501(c)3 organization.*

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
*Since 1989, we have served over 4900 grieving children & teens.*

## A Message of Equity From Our Founder

"As the Founder and President of Camp HOPE, I have seen people's raw grief for over 30 years. The grief we have all witnessed in this country specifically among Black and Brown people in the last several weeks is heartbreaking.

We know this pain is not new. It is time for change. People of color experience overt racism and microaggressions each and every day. We cannot accept the racial disparities we build and perpetuate. Nor can we allow for communities of color to stand alone in addressing racial injustice.

Black Lives Matter. Camp HOPE supports all who are doing the necessary work to dismantle systems of oppression and to fight against racial injustice in our communities. In the coming months, you will see this commitment translate to tangible change within our internal organizational policies and practices - ensuring Camp HOPE is truly a place where all kids and families experiencing grief can feel welcome - regardless of the color of their skin."

Becky Kraemer Loy  
 Founder/President, Camp HOPE



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WINTER 2021

Website: [www.camphopeforkids.org](http://www.camphopeforkids.org)  
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*"Thank you to all our wonderful kitchen staff for your many years of commitment and kindness shared with our families at Camp HOPE. We deeply appreciate everything!"*

## 2020

I'll try my best not to talk all about the virus, but let's be real- I don't think a year in review report is possible without acknowledging the pandemic. 2020 started out like any other year, a year of hope, planning, improving, preparing... a year of optimism and anticipation, a year of growth. Over the winter months, I received calls from multiple families and listened to the heartbreaking losses they experienced. As each family shared their painful stories, I knew in my heart, Camp HOPE could offer space for safety, support, friendship and healing. I couldn't wait to welcome them to our spring camp. Planning had begun, we had shared ideas for activities, accommodations had been set with the Lions Camp and preparations were in motion.

The novel Coronavirus arrived sometime late winter. We watched the news anxiously as schools went virtual, stay at home orders and mask mandates were set, personal protective supplies sold out throughout the nation and people were asked to quarantine.



With each passing week, the world seemed a little more lonely and uncertain. Camp HOPE was needed more than ever, but as the positive cases began to rise, the concern for keeping our camp families safe became the top priority. In March, the Camp HOPE board and I made the difficult decision to cancel our spring camp.

Soon after, we announced the Camp HOPE golf outing, our largest fundraiser would be cancelled as well. This posed another challenge and deep negative impact.

By mid summer, all public gatherings were being cancelled; even funerals. I began receiving phone calls from families who were now experiencing losses during the pandemic, who were not able to have a proper memorial service, be with their loved one as they passed away or accept hugs from family and friends in fear of catching or spreading the virus. After many months of social distancing, hand sanitizer and virtual communications, the board and I met again in July and ultimately made the very difficult decision to cancel our fall and winter camps as well.

While we cannot be together in person, we are now offering a self guided activity journal on our website for past and future campers to do at home. Each journal provides writing prompts, guided meditations and activities to support an individual grief journey. As you reflect, please feel the support and love from all of us at Camp HOPE.

Although 2020 continues to be challenging, I know the heart of our organization is strong and with your help, we can make 2021 a renewed year of healing. I am happy to share we have dates set for 2021: May 15-16 and October 9-10. With your support, we will continue our mission. If you are interested in volunteering or donating to Camp HOPE, please visit our website for more details. Please take care and stay healthy.

Vicky Wittman, Director, Camp HOPE

## Meet Camp HOPE's Newest Board Members



**MARIA LOY, SECRETARY** Many of you may recognize my last name and so I don't know if I need much introduction. I am the oldest daughter of Becky Loy, the founder of Camp HOPE, and so Camp has been a part of my life since I've been 2. I grew up in a home where grief and loss was talked about as we sat around the kitchen table and because of this my love of the Camp community began even before I was old enough to attend. I was allowed to come to Camp as a camper when I was small, around six or seven, but that backfired on my mom when she realized that all I wanted to do was hang on her leg and follow her around. Lesson learned! I wasn't allowed back until I was 16, old enough to be a junior counselor...and I've been coming ever since. The Camp HOPE community is my second family. The family that saw me attached to my momma's hip as a child, loved me as my depression and anxiety peaked throughout high school and college, and celebrated with me as I graduated with my masters in social work and entered my first job (A social worker? Clearly Camp had just a little

bit of an impact on who I am today). I joined the Board because I want to give back to my second family. I want to make sure that we keep Camp HOPE the loving place that it already is, while pushing us to grow together in wonderful ways. I am excited for our newest chapter with Vicky. Her soul is such a beautiful addition to our loving Camp family and as a Board, I want to make sure she feels fully supported. I am so grateful for this opportunity to be part of the Camp HOPE Board. Thank you.



**ALEXIS DEAN, BOARD MEMBER** My name is Alexis Dean, and I'm hoping to bring my full heart and dedication to the Board. I wanted to join the Board to add even more diversity to an already diverse group, but not just meaning being a Black man. Growing up in Milwaukee, WI was difficult to grapple with after losing my dad to gun violence when I was seven years old. So, a camp like Camp HOPE would've been monumental for me at that age if I knew about it. Luckily, I was blessed with an introduction of what Camp was about four years ago in my 20s, but I want to help our Camp reach children who don't often see outside of the city with their families. Young people who have experienced similar situations as me, and can see that there are people who will be in their corner when given the resources and information. I also want to inspire more people who look like me to experience the joy of being

a counselor. Though Camp makes you feel like you're not alone, I knew I wasn't the only kid who lost his parent in my neighborhood or school. My biggest need wasn't to feel like I wasn't alone. It was to know what to do when you're surrounded by people who are also hurting. That's why I've wanted to dedicate my life to helping others, spreading positivity, and spreading love. Camp HOPE has taught me so much about myself and the world. I will also feel like a member, counselor, and even a camper while spending time with my extended family around the beauty of lit candles.



**KRISTI ANDERSON, VICE PRESIDENT** I was 11 years old when my dad died of a heart attack at home. And honestly, I was not thrilled about the idea of going to Camp HOPE. I mean really – grief camp, I can think of a lot of other ways to spend a weekend. I expected Camp to be a sad place – filled with heartache and pain – and where people expected things from me I was not ready for. But what I found at Camp, was joy, life, hope, empathy, compassion, understanding, acceptance, and most of all love. Camp HOPE is a place where the people standing alongside you know your pain. Where no one judges your sadness, your anger, or your hurt. Camp is a place where we honor the rawness of our pain while celebrating the beautiful loved ones we've lost. It's been 20 years since my dad died. I still miss the way he smelled, I miss hearing him call my name from across a room and the joy and light he carried through the world. I ache to dream about him – if only for a few precious moments – because dreams are the places I feel him the most close. I don't wish the pain of losing a loved one

on anyone – but I do hope that if you know that pain – that you get to experience the kind of love and support I found as a camper and continue to find as a volunteer at Camp HOPE. The kind of support that comes from knowing that you are not alone in your grief, and the kind of love that reminds you that even on the worst days – the days where you can hardly breathe – that you can find a path forward. I joined the Camp HOPE board to ensure that the promise we make to families at Camp and the legacy of this special organization lives on for decades to come.



**LILIA FIGUEROA, BOARD MEMBER** I came to Camp HOPE as a camper when I was 13 years old after my dad had passed away from cancer. Coming to Camp was not a decision I would have made for myself (being a wise 13 year old). My mom thought it would be a good experience for my sister and I to process our grief with others who had lost a loved one. I was very upset with my mom when she told me the night before I was going to Camp. There are likely archived photos of me arriving at Camp with the most unhappy look on my face. At the time I struggled with the idea of opening up to people about my grief when I was one of a few people in my community who had lost a parent. School counselors would check in with me to see how I was doing but I only shared what they wanted to hear because I didn't like the idea of being pulled from classes and made to feel different for having lost my dad. In the end, my mom made the best decision for me. That weekend at Camp HOPE allowed me to openly speak about my dad and cry without feeling ashamed for my grief or

worrying about making others uncomfortable. The counselors at Camp HOPE didn't push me to open up and allowed me to be angry for being there. I can't tell you what moment that anger all slipped away and allowed me to open up and have fun again but I know it was the magic of Camp HOPE. I will say that is one of the reasons I kept coming back as a junior counselor in high school and as an adult. I wanted kids to be able to know it was okay to be angry, to open up on their own time, and to not feel shame in their grief. Camp HOPE has become a part of my identity and has given me a second family who has seen me grow from the quiet, angry 13 year old to the passionate social worker I am today. By serving on this board, I have the opportunity to give back on a broader scale to continue to improve Camp for many years to come and to ensure that we continue to keep the magic that is Camp HOPE at the heart of our decisions. Being a part of Camp HOPE's board is a small way that I can say thank you to what they gave me, which was hope that I wouldn't be lost in my grief.

Many of the gifts received were given in tribute and recognition of special individuals. All gift tributes are noted by the *italicized names* after the donor's name.

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