



## Needs Statement

According to the American Cancer Society, 12,060 children under the age of 15 will be diagnosed with cancer in the United States, in the year 2012 alone<sup>1</sup>. Of those new diagnoses, 235 will be in the state of Arizona<sup>2</sup>. The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation states that 30,000 Americans are currently living with this disease, almost 55% of them being under the age of 18<sup>3</sup>. All in all, there are approximately 500,000 children under the age of 18 living in the United States that cope with a life-threatening medical condition<sup>4</sup>, along with 27,000 new diagnoses in this age group, every single year<sup>5</sup>. Cancer and cystic fibrosis are just two types of medical conditions that can threaten a child's life.

There are numerous organizations throughout the country that are constantly searching for cures for these conditions. There are many hospitals and palliative care centers that help the children and their families throughout the treatment process. However, there is one important aspect that the medical community does not always offer. One element that is crucial when a child is fighting for his or her life. One feeling that can give a child a reason to live.

Hope.

Children who are fighting for their lives, and the family members who are standing by their sides all need hope. They need a feeling of anticipation, something to look forward to, that will give them an extra reason to fight, and an extra reason to live. This is what HopeKids strives to provide. There are other nonprofit organizations who grant children with life-threatening illnesses wishes, but HopeKids is different.

Mason is a HopeKid, and he had already been granted a wish from a national organization when his cancer came back. "Other wish organizations would not grant any additional wishes for him," said Mason's mother, Courtney, "even though he had to face more procedures and operations this time than the first." According to the Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Foundation of Southern Arizona (Candlelighters), the average length of treatment for childhood cancer is approximately two years<sup>2</sup> – once a child's initial wish or dream is realized, what is left for them to look forward to? At HopeKids, it does not matter how many wishes a child has already received; once a HopeKid, always a HopeKid. Their battle does not end after a single day, so neither does the support offered by this organization.

When a child is fighting a life-threatening illness, parents and siblings are affected as well. Research has shown that when a child fights cancer, "parents and siblings report even greater long-term emotional impacts than the diagnosed child."<sup>2</sup> Along with the emotional toll, the physical, and financial costs attributed with the care for a child with these conditions can be detrimental to the parents and siblings, as well. Yet, parents and siblings are often forgotten by other organizations who serve this population. HopeKids aims to fill this void. These incredible children and their families may continue to take part in HopeKids' activities even after they are no longer fighting a medical condition.

Whether the hope brought to these children through the anticipation of fun events and activities acts as a catalyst for change with regards to a child's health is extremely hard to measure. What is clear, however, is the individual impact it has on the attitudes of the children and their families. "The opportunity to look forward to something fun and exciting", stated Mason's mother, Courtney, "was a huge boost to [Mason's] morale when he had to go through the very worst times."



HopeKids understands that their organization cannot promise these families freedom from their medical troubles, but hope can be a powerful medicine, and it may just be the extra incentive that gives a child the will to live, and pushes them towards their cure.

### References

1. *American Cancer Society*. (2012). Cancer facts and figures 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.cancer.org/acs/groups/content/@epidemiologysurveillance/documents/document/acspc-031941.pdf>
2. *Childhood cancer facts*. (2010, March 14). Retrieved from <http://www.candlelightersaz.org/pages/?id=13>
3. *Frequently asked questions*. (2011, May 8). Retrieved from <http://www.cff.org/AboutCF/Faqs/>
4. Himmelstein,, B., Hilden, M., Morstad Boldt, A., & Weissman, D. (2004). Pediatric palliative care . *The new england journal of medicine*, 350(17), 1752-1762. Retrieved from <http://www.lumen.luc.edu/lumen/MedEd/EOL/Pediatric Palliative Care.pdf>
5. *Make a wish foundation*. (2010). Retrieved from [http://www.wish.org/var/wish\\_user/storage/original/application/bf595952864f385d834963896551cf63.pdf](http://www.wish.org/var/wish_user/storage/original/application/bf595952864f385d834963896551cf63.pdf)