

Vintrell's Story by Ashlee Kieler

Born at 25 weeks and 5 days, Vintrell was just 1 pound at birth. He was diagnosed with heart disease, lung disease, high blood pressure, developmental delays and a myriad of other obstacles. That was two years ago. Today, the toddler is happy at home with his mother Markasha. "Without AHK it wouldn't be possible to get him home. Vintrell can now roll over and stand up and support himself a bit," she says. "He's starting to walk and everyday he picks up a new skill. He is amazing and getting stronger every day." Despite his progress, Markasha vividly remembers the first time she was put in touch with AHK. "I was so lost, it was so scary," she recalls. "I didn't know what a G-tube or a trach was. He was so fragile. They helped me find my way to get him to this point. They were like a family." In addition to providing therapies and care for Vintrell, Markasha says the nurses and other staff at AHK were always looking out for her.

"The journey was rough, but I wouldn't have it any other way," she says. "They taught me patience and how to care for him. I just love AHK. They can get your child to a place you never thought they could go."

As Vintrell and Markasha settle into their new routines at home, they continue to lean on AHK who helped set up his therapy sessions and other interventions to ensure Vintrell continues to thrive. "He has been great," Markasha says. "It has been very different having him home, but overall, it's been a blessing and I am so happy he is here." Markasha looks forward to Vintrell's future with the support of AHK and the nurses and staff she now sees as family. "We are talking about school next year, and that would be great for him to be around other kids and have that experience," Markasha says. "We're not done – I know there is respite available when we need it. And I want to say that for any family who has a child who is medically complex, bring your child to AHK – they will help a lot."

Since this article was written, Vintrell's home health nursing fell through and Vintrell has temporarily returned to the safety net of Almost Home Kids. Home health nursing is a vital part of a successful transition home. Our Case Management Team continues to advocate for the family and to help identify and restaff his home health nursing support as well as coordinating care with Vintrell's specialists, therapists and physician. We will soon be, once again, transitioning Vintrell back home with his loving family.



Vintrell having fun with Elmo



Vintrell shows off his tooth brushing skills with mom and RN, Stephanie

Our Volunteers

Volunteer of the Quarter Awards

The dictionary defines volunteerism as the policy or practice of volunteering one's time or talents for charitable, educational, or other worthwhile activities, especially in one's community.

Almost Home Kids is very fortunate to have a wonderful variety of talented volunteers that commit to a schedule to volunteer with the children several times a month, assist us with administrative tasks, contribute their hard work on volunteer projects on site or volunteer at one of our important fundraisers and sometimes – all of the above! Each and every volunteer makes a huge difference in sharing the care at AHK. We choose volunteers that go above and beyond their volunteer role and we highlight them as our Volunteer of the Quarter.

Naperville

Leslie Rheingruber has been an absolutely delightful volunteer in Naperville for the past nine years and has compassionately given over 350 volunteer hours with our children in Naperville. Our staff know they can count on Leslie to come in each week to comfort the children by snuggling with a child or reading story books or even chasing a toddler around for some fun. Leslie has also volunteered at fundraiser events with the AHK crew and has kindly helped us secure auction items from the community. We are delighted to recognize Leslie as a dedicated and outstanding volunteer!

How and when did you come to be involved with Almost Home Kids?

“I became involved with Almost Home Kids in the spring of 2013. I would be driving down Rt. 53 in Naperville and would see the AHK sign and wondered what this organization was all about. I was so happy to find out there were volunteer opportunities as I was looking for a way to give back.”

Tell us about a typical day for you as a volunteer at AHK.

“When I arrive at AHK for my volunteer shift - after checking in, grabbing a mask and washing my hands, I go back to the nurse's area and find out where the nurses would like me to be. They know I am always up for holding a baby, but happy to play and read to a child also. Some days I sit and rock a child to sleep. I sing songs, read stories, and just snuggle. Or I may build with blocks, read a book, or follow a toddler around the house.”



Volunteer of the Quarter Leslie Rheingruber surrounded by AHK staff and Evon

What is the most enjoyable and rewarding aspect of your work at AHK?

“I love being part of a child's day. Holding them, playing with them is as good for me as it is for them. Maybe more so! When I see a smile, or a hear a laugh I know that I have made a difference.”

Does your volunteer role give you the chance to use talents that you love sharing? Or to build new skills you're glad to have?

“I am a retired nurse so I'm comfortable around the medical needs of the kids. I am also a mom and a grandmother, so playing, reading, and rocking are part of my skill set! And volunteering is keeping me flexible as I can get down on the floor, and back up!!!”

What keeps bringing you back as a volunteer and would you recommend AHK to friends as a good place to volunteer?

“I have shared my experiences and have found people interested in joining as a new volunteer. The staff is so helpful and happy to have volunteers. And the kids, that is what keeps me coming back.”

Chicago

In the 10 months that **Caroline McLendon** has volunteered at Almost Home Kids, she has made such a positive impact on all the children that she captivates with her enthusiasm during her volunteer shifts. She builds relationships with the kids by coming in regularly and will use sign language to communicate with the children when needed. It is obvious that Caroline's true passion is working with children and finding ways to help our children reach developmental goals while having fun at the same time. We also truly value her willingness to pick up extra shifts when we ask which is so crucial! On top of the many hours spent volunteering with the children Caroline also stepped up to volunteer at our largest fundraiser of the year - our Share the Care Ball and recruited a friend to complete our volunteer team. We appreciate the difference Caroline makes in the lives of the children we care for and are thrilled to recognize her.

How and when did you come to be involved with Almost Home Kids?

"I learned about Almost Home Kids this summer when I moved to Chicago. I was looking for hospital-like settings to volunteer at and came across AHK in my searches. My interest was immediately peaked, as I had never worked in a transitional setting like this before."

Tell us about a typical day for you as a volunteer at AHK.

"For me, each visit to AHK is different. I love the variety of kids I get to play with. Some days I will spend my time holding a baby to get them to sleep peacefully, other days I'm reading to children or playing with musical toys."

What is the most enjoyable and rewarding aspect of your work at AHK?

"I try to volunteer at least once a week. This has allowed me to get to know the children better and form relationships with them. I love watching the little ones grow and develop. I also love when I come to their door, ask them if they want to play (often by using sign language) and see a giant smile come across their faces. Listening to their laughs and giving the children a sense of normalcy through play is incredibly rewarding to me."

Does your volunteer role give you the chance to use talents that you love sharing? Or to build new skills you're glad to have?

"Both! I love to spend time with children, and I try to bring my bubbly personality and knowledge of childhood development into each interaction I have. Working with children with medical complexities, which I only have some experience with, has taught me so much as well."

What keeps bringing you back as a volunteer and would you recommend AHK to friends as a good place to volunteer?

"One of the greatest things about AHK is every time I volunteer, I am reminded that kids are kids, no matter what their medical needs are. All kids love to play and love to interact with others. It brings me so much joy to spend time with the children at AHK. I love that sometimes the things that make them laugh the most are not their favorite toys but are the funny noises I make while I 'fly' my hands around in the air. I would highly recommend anyone and everyone to volunteer at AHK!"



Princess Malaysia enjoying a game with Volunteer of the Quarter Carolyn McLendon

Our Community

Philanthropy Made Easy

Donor Advised Funds

There are many ways you can help Almost Home Kids. You can provide goods, donate your time or give money. A lesser known, but very powerful way to donate to your favorite charity is through a donor advised fund (DAF). A DAF is a charitable donation vehicle which allows you to make a contribution of cash or appreciated securities (generally stock) to the Fund and then advise it to make grants to your designated charity.

The benefits of using this type of fund include:

Immediate tax savings

Tax free growth

Capital gains avoidance

Minimize reporting requirement

If you are interested in setting up a DAF, there are many community foundations and financial services companies who operate them. One stipulation to keep in mind is that you cannot use DAFs to satisfy a pledge or to purchase tickets/table at an event. For more information, please contact Raeann Jackson at rjackson@almosthomekids.org or (312) 282-7081.

Tom Tuch has been humbly improving lives at AHK in Naperville for over 23 years. He quietly maintains our grounds on projects of all sizes – digging holes for our septic tank, lifting heavy pipes, cutting away weeds, laying down sod, removing trees, plowing our driveway and parking lot after every snow fall to ensure our staff and families can safely access AHK during the winter months – you name it, and he’s done it. One year he even relocated a heavy statue for us! There is never a bill for the hard work of Tom and his crew from Home Landscape. His labor and pro-bono gifts have not gone unnoticed or unappreciated. Tom and his wife Lynne recently made a gift using a Donor Advised Fund and we asked them to share their motivation:

“One our favorite charities is Almost Home Kids. The first time you step foot on the property you see what wonderful and heartfelt work is being done there. We have been blessed with our own children and grandchildren and it is with love that we want to help families that need the resources available at AHK.”

-Tom Tuch

“Tom has spent many hours donating his time there as it is truly a special place but we also like to make monetary contributions. This past year our financial advisor suggested starting a Donor Advised Fund to make our charitable contributions. We look at it as a charitable investment account, for the sole purpose of supporting or favorite charitable organizations. We can donate stocks to fund the account, which can potentially grow, and can increase the amount we can donate to any not-for-profit organization. We found it to be a very rewarding way of giving.”

-Lynne Tuch



Tom and Lynne Tuch spending some time with Marianna in the garden at AHK Naperville



Children's Supplies Wish List: (items must be new, please)

The items on our Wish List are things we will utilize at both our Naperville & Chicago sites. If it is convenient for you – we have an Amazon Baby Registry that is constantly updated with current needs for the children and/or household items. Please visit Amazon.com and click on Baby Registry and in the Search bar type in Almost Home Kids/Naperville. It's easy to order there and the items will be shipped directly to our Naperville site to be shared between Naperville & Chicago.

Or you can shop on your own and drop off at the Naperville site ideally Monday-Friday when we have a full staff to welcome you and accept the donations. If you have any questions reach out to Lisa Snow, Community Relations Manager at lsnow@almosthomekids.org Thank you for your kindness and generosity!



Children's Supplies Wish List:

- Unscented baby wipes
- Johnson & Johnson baby wash & lotion
- Large bath towels
- Twin bed sheets
- Standard crib jersey knit bed sheets
- Infant play gym activity mat
- Graco pack n' play
- Leckey Squiggles Stander Tray (\$293) adaptivemall.com/sqstr.html
- Children's hardcover sensory books
- Toddlers stacking or sorting toys
- Bubbles and bubble blower for outside fun

House/Office Supplies Wish List:

- Forever postage stamps
- K-Cups for a 2.0 Keurig coffee maker
- Dry erase chisel tip markers any color
- iPads for children

Our Events

AHK 2022 Event Calendar

2022 has kicked off in style with a resurgence of our in-person events!

The Shamrock Shuffle was in-person this year, with runners committing to complete the 8k at the Bank of America Shamrock Shuffle on March 20th. Over 50 runners made up the AHK Running Team – a record number of participants – raising over \$5,000! AHK Board Member Chris Schenkenberg led the individual fundraising efforts and also ran on the Grant Thornton Team raising over \$1,200 and Team Rainforest, with 39 runners, won the team honors with a total of \$2,240. We were really excited to see AHK grad Nigel and his dad Jimmy join the team again! Nigel came to AHK in 2013 for Transitional Care and it is so great to see how well he continues to do! Thank you to everyone who donned the orange shirt and ran for a reason!

It was Game On at our sold-out Crosstown Classic gala on April 22, 2022 at the Hyatt Lodge Oak Brook. We were back in person after two years of virtual events and lots of postponements. Our host Wayne Messmer kicked things off in style with a rousing version of the National Anthem and the G-Man (auctioneer Greg Bellinger) kept up the energy helping us raise over \$180,000! We recognized the Hinsdale Junior Women's Club and Radio Flyer for their amazing contributions to Almost Home Kids, and Jen and Tim Whitney gave a heartwarming parent testimonial about their daughter Abby's journey at AHK. Special thanks to the Naperville committee led by Bethany Keown, Yonhee Gordon, and Kathy Wennerstrum, who were joined by Jeff Brown, Erin LaMantia, Terry Gallagher, Stacie Gannon, Suzy Shinkle, and Katreina York-Koprowski. Also, a big thank you to Adam Russell (former White Sox pitcher) who attended the event and was very generous with his time and to the following sponsors JMG Financial Group, Mullarkey, Nueco,

UPS, BKD, First Midwest Bank, HUB and Fifth Third Bank for their generosity and support. The **AHK Young Associates Board** led by Mo Salem (President), Naz Salehitezangi (Vice President), Jeff Brown (Secretary) and Courtney Lefevre (Event Chair) have embarked on their 8th annual event, "No Place Like Home" which will be held in-person on June 3rd at 6:30pm to 9:30pm at Hubbard Inn (110 W Hubbard in Chicago). Tickets are still available for this cool mixer in the city – visit our website almosthomekids.org for more information.

Our annual wine tasting event "**Tasting for a Cause**" will be on June 16th, 2022. This year's in-person event will be held at Verve Wine + Provisions – a very cool wine store and restaurant owned by Somm documentary star Dustin Wilson! Our very own wine experts (and committee members) Michelle Baker, Julia Chappell, Carley Diedrich, Bregan Herrold, Lourdes McKillop, Karin Prangley, Rolanda Shine, and Sophia Worden have secured some amazing raffle items that will add to what promises to be a very fun evening! Register through our website or contact Andrea for more info at ankerr@almosthomekids.org or (312) 227-0204.

The **2022 Golf Marathon** will be live on September 16th, 2022. The Golf Marathon will take place at Zigfield Troy Golf Course. As always, we are looking for individuals and foursomes to sign up to golf and of course pledge to raise some much-needed funds for Almost Home Kids. Please visit our website to sign up and golf 100 holes followed by a BBQ meal! Any questions or for more information, please contact Matt Szeghy at mszeghy@prescientsolutions.com or (312) 208-7314.

This year's **Share the Care Ball** will be truly memorable – save the date (October 28th, 2022) for an experience unlike any other, at the Hotel Intercontinental, with a host of cool surprises. For more information and to get on the list early please contact Andrea at ankerr@almosthomekids.org or (312) 227-0204.



Crosstown Classic Gala Volunteers



Crosstown Classic Co-chairs Bethany Keown, Kathy Wennerstrum and Yonhee Gordon



Team Rainforest, Shamrock Shuffle



Jay and Jessica, owners of the Rainforest Learning Center and champions of Team Rainforest



The 2022 AHK Running Team gearing up for the race with Nigel's Knights, Team Grant Thornton and Team Rainforest leading the way

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Almost Home Kids provides a bridge from hospital to home through an innovative community-based care system for children with medical complexities. We respond to the needs of families, train caregivers, offer respite care, advocate for accessibility and inclusion and educate healthcare professionals.

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