

# AHK Update

Fall Winter 2023





## About Almost Home Kids

Almost Home Kids coordinates all the community-based medical and social services that a child and their family will need while also providing respite care in a home-like setting.

## Mission

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.

## Impact

Statistics about how kids and their families have been helped through Almost Home Kids:

- Less than **2% of children** are readmitted to the hospital after being discharged from AHK.
- **75% of parents** report a reduction of stress upon completion of the transitional care program at Almost Home Kids.
- Parents are **100% competent** in their children's care before being discharged from AHK.
- A stay at Almost Home Kids costs almost **400% less** than a hospital stay.

Learn more about our services, mission, impact, and team members at **[almosthomekids.org](https://almosthomekids.org)**.

## Peter's Story

After being in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Central DuPage Hospital for 217 days, Peter Dioro came to Almost Home Kids. The short stop before eventually transitioning to his family home helped to shape not just his life, but those of his mother Lisa, grandmother, and the AHK community.

Peter weighed just 2-pounds, 6-ounces when he was born prematurely with heart and lung complications. His medical complexities required care nearly every hour of the day while in the NICU and at AHK.

While his family was understandably scared for Peter's future, they began to see the possibilities for him, gathered as much information as they could and gained as much training and help as possible during their stay at AHK. The family was able to piece-by-piece learn the things they needed to ensure Peter's transition home was a success, including having time to interview home health nurses who would assist the family.

Peter's mom, Lisa, shared that one of the more concerning aspects of Peter's care involved his nutrition. He had a food sensitivity that made Peter's early years an "emotional roller coaster," as he was fed through a feeding tube that caused personal challenges as he grew.

Eventually, Peter no longer needed a feeding tube and flourished at home and school. As a senior in high school, Peter was awarded the MLK Character Award by the Naperville School District. Now finishing his first year at Northern Illinois University majoring in Mechanical Engineering, Peter and his family have never forgotten the support and guidance they received from AHK.

In fact, Peter's grandmother, Melody, feels that he wouldn't be who he is today without AHK, noting that his journey was blessed beyond measure by the medical and emotional support the family received during their stay.

It's a feeling the family puts to action each year when they visit AHK to bring donations gathered from family, friends and church members. Peter never misses a chance to find himself among the photo collage that hangs in the family room, smiling as he sees his progress.

Show your support today by visiting [almosthomekids.org](http://almosthomekids.org) or by mailing a check via the attached donation envelope.



*Peter points to a photo of himself as a baby at Almost Home Kids*



*Peter and his grandmother, Melody, making their annual donation to AHK*

# Volunteer Spotlight

## Chicago

Morgan Langereis has been a Recreational Volunteer at our Chicago site for over 15 months and has been a wonderful addition to our weekend volunteer team. She works full-time in clinical research for Lurie Children's Hospital but prioritizes carving out time to volunteer with our children each weekend. Morgan wanted to work with our children and families to help in any way she could knowing that this is a very stressful time in the lives of our families. She is great at providing fun activities with the children to make their day special. Our clinical staff truly appreciates her compassion and dedication. She consistently signs up for shifts and does all she can during her shift to engage the children in developmental play. She puts smiles on their faces! Our nurses think Morgan is wonderful with the kids and appreciate her weekend loyalty! We are grateful that Morgan made a commitment to herself as well as AHK to make a difference in the lives of the children. We know we are lucky to have her as a dedicated Recreational Volunteer and thrilled to award her as the Chicago Volunteer of the Quarter!

## Naperville

Bob Janis has been a terrific asset to the Naperville Volunteer Program from the day he walked in for his first shift last fall. When he applied, he literally checked all the boxes to volunteer and help in any way we needed him and that's just what he has done with us this past year. Our staff looks forward to when Bob is on the volunteer schedule because of the calm and cheerful way he engages with the kids. Not only does Bob have a special way of connecting with the children in our care, but he also sincerely cares about our staff and spoils them with delicious meals and kindness! His contributions don't end with the children and staff; he has also been part of the amazing team that kept our gardens looking great by watering new plants and bushes. We are grateful for the many ways Bob enthusiastically supports our mission and we are happy to recognize Bob as our Naperville Volunteer of the Quarter.

**“To be chosen as the Volunteer of the Quarter from what is such an outstanding group of volunteers beyond humbles me. I am grateful for this honor...and grateful to be a part of the AHK team...who changed my life for the better in so many ways!”**

For more information on how to be a volunteer, contact Lisa Snow at [lsnow@almosthomekids.org](mailto:lsnow@almosthomekids.org)



Morgan Langereis, Chicago Volunteer of the Quarter with Lil Will

**“Spending my weekends at AHK Chicago, providing entertainment and enrichment to [the children], has been an incredible gift. I love being able to give comfort and have fun with them outside their treatments. The nurses and staff at AHK are absolutely wonderful and are always there to help me get to every kid that needs my support the most. I found AHK through my employment at Lurie Children's and love that I get to interact with the children as they transition home.”**



Bob Janis receives his Naperville Volunteer of the Quarter recognition from Eden and the Naperville clinical team

# Donor Spotlight

## Transformative Investment in Children

Almost Home Kids is thrilled to announce a second transformational gift of \$921,000 from the Harper Family Foundation; bringing their total philanthropic investment to nearly \$2 million. Harper Family Foundation trustees make innovative and transformative investments in human capital that have a direct impact on people, enabling them to be healthy and productive, and to make measurable and meaningful contributions to their families and communities. They support children and families with serious and complex diseases, while accelerating access to novel treatments and innovative solutions to related problems.

In honor of this generous gift to support the Physical, Occupational, and Speech Therapy Programs as well as Child Life at AHK, each of these programs now bare the name of the Harper Family Foundation. These essential supportive services allow children to strive towards meeting developmental milestones so they can transition home, grow up as part of a family and be part of their community.

*Speech Therapist Jennifer with Israel*



Established in 1993, the Harper Family Foundation is a private foundation based in Omaha, Nebraska. This is the foundation of the late Charles (Mike) Harper, who was the former CEO of ConAgra Foods and RJR Nabisco, and his late wife, Joan (Josie) Harper. The couple's four children and their family lines serve as trustees of the foundation.

Show your support today by visiting [almosthomekids.org](http://almosthomekids.org) or by mailing a check via the attached donation envelope.

## Giving Tuesday Announcement

All donations will be matched from 11/1/23 to 12/15/23 by one of our Giving Tuesday sponsors: Topfer Family Foundation and Jet Brite Car Wash.



*Lil Will enjoying bubbles with his clinical team*



## Clinical Leadership News

**“We are thrilled to announce two notable additions to the AHK clinical leadership team—David Kruger, RN, DNP is our new Chief Operating Officer at Almost Home Kids (AHK) and Jennifer Bates, BSN, RN, CCM, is our new Director of Case Management. Please join me in welcoming both David and Jennifer to the team.” — Debbie Grisko, RN, AHK President and Executive Director.**

David’s role provides oversight of all clinical aspects of AHK including the clinical goals of the organization and provides clinical leadership, direction, and accountability across all three sites, in addition to wider collaboration with the AHK administrative team to further the vision and mission of Almost Home Kids.

David joined AHK in April from his position as Director of Emergency Department and Trauma Center at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago. Prior to his role in the ED, David served as the Director of Hematology, Oncology, and Transplant Services at Lurie. He held various positions at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA) and co-created the Cancer and Blood Institute Service-Line at CHLA prior to coming back to Chicago. David obtained his nursing degree from Concordia University, his master’s degree from University of California, Los Angeles, and his doctorate degree from Boise State University. Areas of focus include systems improvement, hospital management, LEAN management, equity, diversity, and inclusion outcomes, and population health initiatives.

In August, Jennifer joined us from Cigna Clinical Solutions as the Product Strategy Senior Advisor where she developed clinical products to support high acuity patient conditions and disease processes. Prior to Cigna, Jennifer was the Director of Clinical Operations at Optum where she provided global operations leadership to over 150 staff supporting case management activities. In addition, Jennifer has case management and clinical management experience with a keen insight on commercial insurance practices.

As the Director of Case Management, Jennifer works with internal and external teams to develop strategies for transitional care, respite care, care coordination, and ensure optimal utilization of resources and supportive services.

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David Kruger and his wife Tracy at the 2023 Tasting for a Cause event



Jennifer Bates with her husband Kevin at a recent AHK VIP Soiree

## Events



Tobias' dad Samuel delivered a powerful parent testimonial at the Share the Care Ball, a Secret Garden - Photo Credit James A. Vitullo Photography

**Our spring and summer events had stellar turn outs which reflect in our total dollars raised this year. We thank all our fabulous committee members for a job well done and the many wonderful attendees and sponsors who have supported AHK so generously. Special shout out to the fabulous Young Irish Fellowship Club, who presented us with a \$27,000 check for our first year in a two-year commitment as YIFC's charitable beneficiary.**

**The Young Associates Board (YAB), No Place Like Home** event was a night to remember; held at the hip and trendy Fremont Chicago. The event raised over \$30,000 and was attended by over 120 guests. Our new YAB president Nazanin (Naz) Salehitezangi and the YAB committee kept the excitement going with music from DJ Dabura as well as impromptu fireworks display! The night could not have happened without the support of our sponsors Plante Moran, Wintrust, Bluechew, Clayco, and Studio T. We thank them for being a tremendous part of this special evening and supporting young professionals helping to make a difference. If you are interested in learning more about the Young Associates Board, please reach out to Julia Nehf at [jnehf@wintrust.com](mailto:jnehf@wintrust.com).

Our **Tasting for a Cause** explored the age-old battle of French wine versus American wine. This time around, France came out on top, but everyone had a lot of fun picking out the winner. While enjoying wines from these two regions the attendees also learned about the vital work of Almost Home Kids and heard an inspiring testimony by Laura and Jeff Brown about their family's journey with their daughter Josie and her transitional stay at Almost Home Kids. The organizing committee (Michelle Baker, Karin Prangle, Bregan Herrold, Jen Horsley, Carley Dierich, Rolanda Shine, and Sophie Worden) held this year's event for the second year in a row at Verve Wine + Provisions. Thanks to our amazing sponsors Swoon, CIBC Bank USA, Dr. Julie and Mr. James Stamos, Verve Wine + Provisions, Adalina, our wonderful volunteers from Swoon and the 120 very generous guests, the night was a tremendous success. We raised over \$35,000 to benefit Almost Home Kids—thank you all.

**The Leadership Group** came through in a major way this year for Almost Home Kids. Over 80 golfers participated for a day of giving back and supporting kids and families that rely on AHK's services. Special thanks to Board Member Marty Koehler and

his wife Laurie, who co-chaired the organizing committee for this year's event. **The LG Golf Outing** raised a record-breaking \$95,000 for AHK. Samuel Slennett shared his story of his son Tobias and their family's remarkable testimony of how AHK has impacted their lives. A huge thanks to the donors, volunteers and all the amazing sponsors who joined presenting sponsor Marsh McLennan Agency in supporting the event.

Our annual **Golf Marathon**, at the Zigfeld Troy Golf Course, is a great way of supporting AHK and enjoying your favorite sport before the end of the season. Marathoners golfed 100 holes to benefit Almost Home Kids and raised almost \$18,000. Everyone enjoyed an excellent lunch provided by Shannahan's Pub and the post golf dinner sponsored by Q's BBQ. Huge thank you to Enterprise Car Rental for sponsoring the golf carts and to all the golfers who stepped up and not only golfed 100 holes but raised money for AHK through their network of friends and family. Extra special thanks to Dan Ault for Chairing the Golf Committee and to the committee members Paul Bogdanski, Curtis Cooper, Pat Donlin, Angela Figg, Kris Lundgren, Siddharth (Sid) Mantina, and Ryan Satterfield for reinvigorating the committee and hosting a successful peer-to-peer fundraiser.

This year's **Share the Care Ball, A Secret Garden** was a magical affair—going beyond the inspiration of Francis Hodgson Burnett's beautiful novel, our fabulous committee, led by Carley Diedrich and Jigna Patel, created a spectacular backdrop for dinner, dancing and donations galore. The gala raised a staggering \$365,000! We are grateful to Tobias' dad Samuel, who gave a very heartfelt parent testimonial and to the two very worthy awardees Michael T. Hoffman, MD, Share the Care Exemplar and Topfer Family Foundation, Distinguished Donor. Special thanks to Ken Arlen and the Arlen Evolution Orchestra for spectacular live music, the over 300 very generous attendees and to all the sponsors who stepped up in a big way; Cushman & Wakefield, CD Peacock, Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago Medical & Dental Staff Officers, Swoon Staffing, Topfer Family Foundation, The Madhiwala Family, Pasha Orthodontics, Studio T, CA Ventures, Edward-Elmhurst Health, Nueco, University Retina, Old National Bank, Yanni Design Studios, Vin Chicago, WTSO, Speedpro Chicago Loop, James A. Vitullo Photography, Maeve Lefavour Photography and Andrew Ushakov.

### Upcoming Events

- **Shamrock Shuffle**, brought to you by Bank of America: Sunday March 24th, 2024, held downtown Chicago, IL.
- **The Spring Gala, Fire & Ice**, brought to you by Almost Home Kids: Friday, April 19th, 2024, held at the Hyatt Lodge in Oak Brook, IL.

For more event information, contact Andrea at [ankerr@almosthomekids.org](mailto:ankerr@almosthomekids.org)

## Ways to Support

### Donate Money

Help Almost Home Kids make a difference in the lives of children and families today by donating at [almosthomekids.org/give](https://almosthomekids.org/give) or by enclosing a check in the attached donation envelope.

### Donate to Our Children's Supplies Wish List:

(Items must be new, please.)

The items on our Wish List are things we will utilize at both our 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. Items will be shipped directly to our Naperville site to be shared between both our Naperville & Chicago sites. You can also 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. Thank you for your kindness and generosity!

### Therapist Supplies Wish List:

- Switch Adaptive Toys & Games – Enabling Devices
- Musical & light up caterpillar, LED fan & musical bear stacker (\$157)
- Fubbles Fun Bubble Machine (\$47)
- Peek-a-Boo Mirror Adapted Sensory Toy (\$180)
- Crib jersey knit sheets
- Infant play gym activity mat
- Baby earmuff noise-canceling headphones

### Children's Supplies Wish List:

- Diapers – Sizes 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6
- Unscented baby wipes
- Pacifier clips
- Johnson & Johnson baby wash & lotion
- Large bath towels
- Twin jersey knit sheets

### House/Office Supplies Wish List:

- Cordless Screw Gun
- Forever postage stamps
- K-Cups for a 2.0 Keurig coffee maker
- Sticky Post-It Notes
- Batteries – AAA, AA & C
- iPad for children
- ORCA 65-Quart Insulated Rolling Cooler with Wheels and Pull Handle

### Volunteer

If you're interested in volunteering, reach out to Lisa, our Community Relations Manager at [lsnow@almosthomekids.org](mailto:lsnow@almosthomekids.org)

### Sponsor an Event

Adopt Almost Home Kids as the beneficiary of a fundraising event such as a run, happy hour, private party, or golf outing! We can help with collateral material, provide a website platform for crowd fundraising efforts, and onsite volunteers for your event. Please reach out to Andrea, our Development Coordinator at [ankerr@almosthomekids.org](mailto:ankerr@almosthomekids.org) to learn more.