The KEYS Program’s 2018 Annual Report

1993 KEYS 2018
Celebrating 25 years of music & smiles!

It’s all about the smiles!
25 Years of Smiles!

On November 20, 2018, the KEYS Program celebrated 25 years of delivering music, hope and smiles to children impacted by cancer and serious illnesses. It is still hard for us to believe so long has passed since my Dad passed away and our journey of smiles began.

As we looked back on old articles and photos from our archive, we thought it would be neat to share how far we have come in 25 years thanks to your support.

♥ In our 1st year at KEYS, we served 84 children in Central New York.
♥ In our 10th year, we traveled up and down the eastern seaboard delivering over 2,000 smiles to KEYS kids in children’s hospitals, camps and special needs sites.
♥ In our 20th year, we were delivering smiles to over 10,000 pediatric patients across the US.
♥ In 2018, our 25th year, we delivered smiles to 732 children here in Central New York and 289 children in 10 states across the US. We raised awareness of the benefits of music with 2,305 parents, medical staff and community members through workshops and awareness events. In addition, we added 5 partner sites making Music Toolkits and the new KEYS Kids Network available to pediatric patients in 258 children’s hospitals and sites across the US that serve over 1.25 million pediatric patients each year.

All of this at no cost to the families and sites we serve thanks to our wonderful volunteers and donors!

Whether you made a donation, volunteered at one of our events or referred us to a family in need, thank you for helping us to deliver BIG smiles to the amazing and brave superheroes we have had the honor of serving for the past 25 years.

We can’t wait to see what smiles we can create together in the next 25!
After all...it’s all about the smiles!

With our heartfelt gratitude and thanks;

Colleen & David Bennett
KEYS Founders
Our Mission

The KEYS Program is a 501c3 nonprofit organization that delivers music, hope and smiles to children impacted by cancer, and those in need of healing, through music outreach, education and advocacy. KEYS provides award-winning patient and family support programs of music outreach, family respite days and sibling support programs that enhance and improve the quality of life of pediatric patients battling cancer and life-threatening illnesses.

In addition, KEYS raises awareness of the benefits of music and provides information and resources to healthcare professionals and parents so they may implement music in the care of the children they love and serve every day.

KEYS provides all of its outreach programs at no cost to the families and sites it serves.

“The KEYS Program offers families and children battling cancer an opportunity to enjoy life through music, respite and silliness. During these difficult times it is often hard to step away and get refreshed. That is where the KEYS Program steps in. They are great!”

~Jenée Kawejsza from Sophie's Giving Tree

Our Wish

There are over 10,000 children who are diagnosed with cancer each year in the US. While survival rates have improved significantly, cancer remains the leading cause of death by disease in children with one in five children not surviving more than 5 years. Current treatments for cancer are harsh and extensive, requiring long periods of time spent in the hospital, significantly impacting a child’s quality of life. At a time when kids shouldn’t have a worry or care in the world, these kids are fighting to survive.

Our wish is for a cure, but until then, we are on a mission to support these brave superheroes throughout this difficult time, enriching and improving their quality of life with music, hope, joy and smiles.

Why Music?

According to recent studies shared by the American Music Therapy Association, music is a beneficial tool in the treatment of children battling cancer.

Music helps to reduce nausea associated with chemotherapy treatments, helps to reduce anxiety in children who are frightened or scared, and children who listen to music during their recovery heal faster than those who do not have music.

Most important of all, music is universal and helps to bring comfort and hope to children of all ages, cultures, languages and backgrounds.
Music Outreach Programs

Music is at the core of our mission at KEYS and we constantly provide a variety of music outreach, therapy and education programs for our KEYS kids throughout the year.

**New KEYS Kids Network**

We expanded our outreach in a BIG way in 2018, through the creation of our new $KEYS Kids Network$. KEYS kids, no matter where they are, can now “tune-in” to enjoy music, inspiration, silly skits and smiles!

The $KEYS Kids Network (KKN)$ officially launched on January 8, 2018 and is shared with all 258 of our partner children’s hospitals, sites and KEYS families making music and smiles available at the bedside of more than 1.25 million pediatric patients across the US.

In 2018, KEYS set up a new “film set” for the $KEYS Kids Network$ at Russell Sage College. Student interns in the creative arts therapy, musical theatre and art departments created a colorful, kid-friendly set and have been working throughout the year writing songs, creating skits and recording episodes. (They have even incorporated puppets into the show!) The new episodes will be premiering in 2019.

Singer/songwriter Emalee Herrington hosted our Coffee House segments on the $KEYS Kids Network$ and started writing custom songs for our KEYS kids through her Emalee’s Musical Medicine project at KEYS. In 2019, we are expanding this project to include a “Recording Experience” for our KEYS kids where they will work together with Emalee to write their own song, record it with Emalee and we will broadcast it on our $KEYS Kids Network$...stay tuned!

**Music Therapy**

In November 2018, we welcomed board certified Music Therapist Adrienne Bornemann to our crew! She is providing in-home music therapy and adaptive music lessons to children and adults with autism and disabilities. This area of our program is funded by the Direct Service program that is available to those with disabilities. We are expanding our in-home music therapy services for KEYS kids who are receiving outpatient cancer treatment in 2019.

**Music Toolkits and Comfort Kits**

In 2018, the KEYS Program added 5 new children’s hospitals and sites to our partner network, providing them with Music Toolkits and connecting their patients to our $KEYS Kids Network$.

In addition, Guidepost donated 500 Comfort Kits to the KEYS Program so we may include them with our Music Toolkits that we give to children when they are newly diagnosed. The Comfort Kits are designed to help sick children feel special and loved, and together with our Toolkits, are the perfect combination of support, love, music and smiles!

“Thank you to the KEYS Program for bringing music & smiles into our hospital room today! It has been a rough week and the KEYS Kids Network was just the pick me up Gavin needed. It was nice to see him smile again. Your love and support shines through each episode. You have truly touched our hearts!  ~Parent of 7 year old cancer patient
25 Years of Holiday Smiles

“We shall never know all the good that a simple smile can do.” Mother Teresa

The KEYS Program celebrated its 25th anniversary with BIG smiles! Together, with the support of our amazing crew of volunteers and generous donors like you, we were able to share the biggest and best holiday smiles outreach for our KEYS kids yet! Here are some of the highlights of the smiles you helped to create...

♥ On Dec. 2nd, we hosted a free Holiday Smiles concert for over 300 families at the Community Activity Center in Sherrill. The concert was broadcast throughout the holiday season on our KEYS Kids Network bringing music, joy and smiles to the bedside of pediatric patients locally and across the country.

♥ We received donations of 378 board games for our holiday deliveries to our KEYS kids. Our Smile Crew volunteers came out to our Holiday Wrap Party on a cold and blustery Sunday to lovingly wrap those games and put them into our Holiday Smiles Care Packages for our KEYS kiddos.

♥ Our Elves delivered 194 Holiday Smiles Care Packages filled with holiday treats, Christmas music and board games to our KEYS kids both locally and in Pennsylvania, Colorado, California, Kentucky and Virginia. Our Paulie’s Super Siblings crew in Virginia made an extra special delivery to a KEYS family whose child was battling a rare illness while their father was deployed overseas.

“Thank you so much for thinking of our family every Christmas. There were lots of smiles when opening those gifts...game night is tonight! And I always love the Christmas CD...I’ve already listened to it twice! Thank you for helping us smile each and every Christmas as they are so hard without Gracie here. Merry Christmas!” ~ Lawton Family

Wear Your Heart on Your Sleeve Day

February is an especially difficult and isolating month for our KEYS kids. It is flu season and because of their compromised immunity, many are unable to have visitors. We “wear our hearts on our sleeve” to let them know they are not alone, that we are thinking about them and sending our "hearts" and love out to them.

924 people in 10 states wore their hearts on their sleeve for our KEYS kids on February 28, 2018. Now that’s a lot of love and smiles!

"Just when we were feeling alone and weary, the KEYS Program shined their light of love into our lives when we needed it the most! The photos of our friends and those we didn't even know wearing their hearts on their sleeve for us reminded us we are not alone and gave us the strength, hope and smiles we so desperately needed.” ~ KEYS parent
This year we hosted not just one...but TWO...Smile Experience family respite days for our KEYS kids in October...one “under the lights” at the Syracuse Quarter Midget Track and the other at the beautiful Oswego County Quarter Midget Track! 47 of our KEYS kids and their siblings and parents enjoyed a day away from cancer treatment and worries to enjoy being the superstars they are for the day!

Our Smile Experience is a special family respite day where kids impacted by cancer get a break from their every day struggles to enjoy music and racing fun with their family! When kids arrive at the track they get suited up in a driver’s suit and assigned a crew chief who provides instruction as they head out on the race track for lap after lap of smiles! Each child wheels into Victory Lane to the cheers of their fans to get a checkered flag, cool trophy, sign autographs and get interviewed by our track announcer. Families enjoy our corporate-style hospitality area where there is music, fun activities and refreshments.

From start to checkered flag finish, each child is treated to a full driving experience and big smiles!

“For everyone at the KEYS Program! This event was more amazing than we could ever imagine! Our son has had a very rough year and to see a smile back on his face (and ours too!) today was more than we could ever ask for. Thank you for doing what you do for our family and all of the KEYS families. You help make this journey bearable. We don’t know what we would do without you!”

Paulie’s Super Siblings Wish Kid!

Paulie’s Super Siblings is a sibling support program at KEYS providing smiles and wishes for the behind-the-scenes heroes, siblings of kids battling cancer. This year’s super sibling was 8 year old Vinny whose older sister Hally is a cancer survivor.

In October, the awesome staff at GameStop helped us to surprise Vinny with a shopping spree at Game Stop and special day at Destiny Mall USA. After shopping, Vinny enjoyed lunch at his favorite sushi restaurant, took some laps in go-karts at the RPM Raceway and had fun with his sister in the Escape Room.

Big smiles were abound in memory of Paulie!
Our “Smile Crew” Volunteers

We couldn’t do what we do without our amazing Smile Crew! In 2018, the KEYS Program had 247 volunteers who gave of their time, talents and hearts to bring smiles to our KEYS families. Some of our volunteers were once our KEYS kids themselves or family members of some of our KEYS kids who have earned their angel wings. They love to share their hearts to help other families going through the same difficult time they have experienced.

“Thank you for this amazing opportunity! I don’t allow myself to think of what it’s really about until after the event...then it hits me. Words fail to describe the beauty of this day. I was thinking about how many organizations I have been involved with over the years...and NONE of them compares to this...I’m still having trouble putting into words the impact of this day...my heart is still smiling!” ~KEYS Volunteer Donna Mucks

Partners and Interns

We couldn’t reach so many children with our amazing partners! Each year KEYS partners with over 250 children’s hospitals, sites and organizations to make a difference in the lives of children locally and across the US.

In 2018, KEYS had student interns from Syracuse University, Nazareth College, Utica College and Ithaca College working with us on recording, technology, outreach and music therapy projects. Students from Syracuse University’s Sigma Alpha Iota Fraternity partnered with KEYS to record songs for our KEYS Kids Network. In addition, Mohawk Valley Youth Build students participated in our Holiday Smile project and “Wear Your Heart on Your Sleeve Day” to bring smiles to our KEYS kids.

KEYS is a proud member of the National Child Life Council, New York State Association for the Education of Young Children, the American Music Therapy Association and is a foundation partner with the NAMM (National Association of Music Merchants) Foundation.

Featured Partner: Russell Sage College

In 2018, KEYS partnered with Russell Sage College to give their students an opportunity to intern with us on our KEYS Kids Network project. Students in the college’s Creative Arts Therapy, Musical Theatre, Psychology and Art Departments have been involved in writing content and songs, creating skits and building a colorful, kid-friendly set for the KEYS Kids Network. The partnership has been so successful that in January 2019, the college created a credit bearing course where students will receive college credit for their work on the project. We can’t wait for you to meet the awesome cast of characters...and puppets...they have added to the program to make the KEYS Kids Network even more fun and interactive for our KEYS kids in 2019. We are thrilled to partner with Sage College and these extraordinary students to create smiles!
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We are thankful for the growing number of donors who make a donation to the KEYS Program via Facebook! If you donated, but do not see your name listed in this report, we offer our apologies. Even though it is wonderful that Facebook offers this service, most of the donations do not have a contact address for us to send a thank you or for us to contact you to get permission to acknowledge your donation in our report.

We truly appreciate your support! Whether you hosted a birthday fundraiser for KEYS, gave to a fundraiser we hosted or simply clicked the “donate” button on our Facebook home page, we want to thank you for all you did in 2018 to help create BIG smiles!
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