The KEYS Program’s 2019 Annual Report

It’s all about the smiles!
www.theKEYSprogram.org
It’s about the smiles...and the hugs!

Nothing is more precious to us than a grateful, heartful hug from our KEYS kiddos! (And 3 year old KEYS kiddo Leah gives the BEST hugs ever!)

We are so honored and blessed to be able to bring music, joy, love, healing and smiles into so many children’s lives each year. 2019 was a record year of those smiles...and hugs at KEYS...and all made possible by our wonderful volunteers, donors and supporters like you!

Sadly, the statistics are that 1 in 5 of our KEYS kids will not survive more than 5 years due to their medical condition. That is what drives us to create precious, magical moments like these for the incredible kids and families that we have the honor to serve.

The numbers and data we collect throughout the year show how many kiddos we reached, but to us, the smiles (and hugs) measure the true impact.

Here are some of the numbers...and smiles...we achieved in 2019 thanks to your support...

♦ 164– the number of children impacted by cancer who enjoyed a break from cancer treatment to attend our Smile Experience family respite days with their family
♦ 266—the number of partner children’s hospitals and sites we served across the US
♦ 311 —the number of children who received Holiday Smile care packages at the holidays
♦ 602— the number of music therapy sessions we provided to children, adults, special needs sites and nursing homes
♦ 537– the number of volunteers who helped to deliver smiles to our KEYS kids
♦ 1,228—the number of people who wore their hearts on their sleeves for our KEYS kids
♦ 1.5 million– the number of pediatric patients across the US who have music therapy information, resources and music available to them to bring comfort, healing and joy to them throughout their journey

All of this was provided at no cost to the families and sites we serve thanks to your support.

Thank you so very much for helping us to deliver BIG smiles to the superheroes we have had the honor of serving for over 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 12,500 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 1 in 5 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 participate in music therapy 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.

KEYS Kids Network

Our KEYS Kids Network shared much needed music, silliness and smiles in 2019! The broadcasts were made available to pediatric patients in 266 partner children’s hospitals and sites across the US that serve over 1.5 million pediatric patients each year. Now that’s a lot of smiles!

Our interns from Russell Sage College’s creative arts therapy, musical theatre and art departments enhanced our broadcasts for our KEYS kids with the addition of Sock-a-Pella Puppets and cool ‘green screen’ that enabled them to take our KEYS kids on a journey outside their hospital room to virtual campfire where they shared campfire songs.

We invite you to tune-in to the KEYS Kids Network to see the beautiful smiles you helped to create at www.keysprogram.org/keys-kids-network-1!

Recording Experience

Our KEYS kids recorded some of their favorite songs with us this year for the KEYS Kids Network. Some KEYS kids performed them for our KEYS families in the music tent at our Smile Experience events and some shared their songs on our social media page.

It was so inspiring to see kids, who despite facing enormous challenges themselves, sharing their gifts and love of music to bring smiles to our fellow KEYS kids!

Summer Music Camp

During the month of August 2019, we hosted our Summer Music Camp program at the Sherrill Library and CenterPoint Community Church locations. Eleven KEYS kids participated in singing, playing instruments, art and music and movement fun this year!

Music Toolkits and Comfort Kits

In 2019, the KEYS Program added 8 new hospital pediatric units and sites to our partner network, providing them with the music, resources and tools they need to implement music in the lives of the children they serve.

63 Music Toolkits were provided to 6 new sites, bringing the number of sites we serve to 266 sites across the United States that serve more than 1.5 million pediatric patients.

KEYS provided 24 Comfort Kits to pediatric patients when they were newly diagnosed with cancer, and other serious illnesses, in 2019. 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!
Music Therapy for our KEYS Kids
This year, our board certified music therapist has been providing much needed music therapy to KEYS kids, including those who are not currently hospitalized, but instead travel to and from home for outpatient cancer treatments. Many of these superheroes are dealing with anxiety, fears and post traumatic stress due to their illness and the harsh treatments that go along with their diagnosis.

Thanks to our donors, we are able to provide hours of music therapy sessions filled with hope, healing and joy to our KEYS kids at no cost to their families.

Music Therapy Expansion Project
Since 1993, the KEYS Program has been provide music therapy and lesson programs for children battling cancer and serious illnesses. Over the years, we have seen a tremendous need for music therapy services for the community, so in 2019, we embarked on expanding our services to special needs children and adults, including those on the autism spectrum, Alzheimer/dementia patients in nursing homes and adult cancer patients.

Thanks to our wonderful foundations and donors, we have been able to provide 602 music therapy sessions to our KEYS kids and those in need of healing in 2019.

"WOW! Our daughter loved her first music therapy session today! She has been singing and smiling all afternoon! It is so wonderful to see her so happy! We wish you could come every day!" - Mary Alyssa's Mom

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.

1,228 people in 12 states wore their hearts on their sleeve for our KEYS kids on February 28, 2019. 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
Holiday Smiles

Together, with the support of our amazing crew of volunteers and generous donors like you, our elves (and reindeer) were able to deliver Holiday Smile Care Packages to a record 311 children impacted by cancer & serious illnesses here in Central New York, and in Pennsylvania, Colorado, California, Kentucky, Missouri, Indiana, North Carolina, Texas and Virginia in 2019.

38 wonderful 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! All in all, we collected and wrapped a record 475 board games this year! Special thank you to the Verona Seventh Day Baptist Church for allowing us to use their hall for our Wrap Party this year!

Many folks helped us to spread Christmas cheer by singing loud for all of our KEYS kids to hear! We broadcasted their videos on our KEYS Kids Network and social media to pediatric patients across the country.

On December 7th, we made our annual stop to Cornue’s Children’s Corner to spread holiday joy and cheer with 35 kids and their families!

Operation Rylee’s Smile! Thanks to a very special anonymous donor, we surprised KEYS kid Rylee, age 17, with a trunk load of Christmas presents! Despite battling childhood cancer herself, Ryle constantly and tirelessly gives back to her community to make the world a better place, and always with her beautiful smile!

On December 6th, KEYS Kids Amelia, Hayden and Blake enjoyed a night at “A Community Christmas” event at the Oneida Community Mansion House. Great American Baking Show Holiday Edition celebrity chef Andrea Maranville hosted this special event to kick off the holiday season! There was a gingerbread house reveal, Elf on a Shelf scavenger hunt, pop up bakery and a delicious spaghetti dinner to benefit our Smile Experience program. How awesome is that!?

We couldn’t do what we do without our dedicated donors, volunteers and sponsors! Thank you to everyone who volunteered, donated a board game or gave to our Giving Tuesday and Holiday Smiles Campaign, along with our amazing holiday sponsors: Silver City Baking Company, Walmart, The Hartford, The Liam M. Kinne Foundation, Stewart’s Holiday Match, New York Central Mutual, Price Chopper’s Golub Foundation, On My Team 16, Zion Lutheran Church, and Mohawk Global Logistics.

“Your elves just stopped by! Thank you again for including us in your amazing work. You and your volunteers are such a blessing. Thank you for making our Christmas so special!!! ~KEYS family
Smile Experience Family Respite Days

In the Fall of 2019, we hosted three Smile Experience family respite days, bringing BIG smiles to KEYS kids and their siblings in Central NY.

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 in our USAC quarter midgets. 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!

All in all, 164 of our KEYS kids and their siblings enjoyed a day away from cancer treatment and worries to enjoy being the superstars they are for the day!

“Thank you to 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!” ~Parent of 6 year old cancer patient

Smile Experience at South Butler Nostalgia Dragway

New this year, the wonderful folks at South Butler Nostalgia Dragway partnered with KEYS to host a special Smile Experience for our KEYS kids at their dragstrip in Savannah, NY!

Friendly Ford of Geneva sponsored the event, providing a VIP hospitality tent trackside, Food (and Ice Cream) Trucks, photos and $500 gift cards for the kids too! (WOW!)

The KEYS kids even took a trip up the dragstrip with the awesome folks from Friendly Ford. Thanks so much Jeff McKee from Friendly Ford, Racin’ Randy and the entire crew at South Butler for making this day so special!
Amelia’s Smile Day!

Sweet, smiling 8 year old Amelia wants to be a chef when she grows up!

Diagnosed with neurofibromatosis type 2 and a rare brain tumor (stage 3 menengioma) when she was 4 years old. Amelia is stable and doing well today, but her life is still made up of regular MRIs, scans and tests to ensure she remains that way.

In August we hosted a special Smile Experience for KEYS kid Amelia who LOVES to cook and dreams of being a chef someday.

Her dream came true when we partnered with Great American Baking Show Holiday Edition finalist, Andrea Maranville to have Amelia visit her bakery and cook up some delicious treats! We even gave Amelia her very own chef coat, hat, cookbook and cake decorating kit, so she can bake up treats for her family and friends for years to come! BIG thanks to our awesome Smile Crew and to Andrea Maranville for opening her bakery...and her BIG beautiful heart... to make Amelia’s day so very special!!

This was the best day of my life! ~Amelia

Robert’s Smile Experience Surprise

Sometimes you attend a Smile Experience...and sometimes the Smile Experience comes to you! That happened in 2019, when the race teams that volunteer with KEYS heard that KEYS kid Robert wasn’t well enough to be able to travel to our Smile Experience. They wanted to do something special to lift his spirits, so Dirt Modified driver and cancer survivor Michelle Coursey donated the side panel off her race car and each and every driver autographed the panel. Robert, a big race fan, was so surprise and thrilled when the KEYS crew delivered the panel to him... he insisted his parents hang in in his room immediately!

Paulie’s Super Siblings

Our Paulie’s Super Siblings program granted wishes to 2 super siblings in 2019!

Super sibling Austin received a really cool bedroom make-over! Our volunteers cleared out the room, painted, and renovated it top to bottom with his favorite movie characters as the theme.

Super Sibling Lily enjoyed a backyard concert with her friends and family by Emalee Herrington, cookout and gift card for Lily to get a trampoline!

In September, Paulie’s mother Angela, hosted the first ever Paulie’s Super Siblings Bowling Tournament at Green Acres Lanes in Central Square, NY. Everyone enjoyed an afternoon of bowling,
Our “Smile Crew” Volunteers

Over the past year, the KEYS Program’s volunteer Smile Crew has doubled in size with 537 volunteers who gave of their time, talents and hearts to bring smiles to our KEYS families. Schools, race teams, dance studios, clubs, churches, musicians, fire departments and colleges have all come on board to help support our KEYS families through our various events and programs. We couldn’t do what we do without our amazing Smile Crew!

“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

Our Interns & Partner Sites

Each year, KEYS partners with child life and music therapy staff in over 250 children’s hospitals, sites and organizations to make a difference in the lives of children locally and across the US.

This past year, KEYS had student interns from Syracuse University, Nazareth College, Utica College, Sage College and Ithaca College working 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: Utica College Interns

The KEYS partnered with Utica College’s Nursing Program to give their students an opportunity to intern with our organization!

Four students, Kendra, Matt, Juan and Patrice joined us for 8 weeks, observing music therapy sessions, volunteering at our Smile Experience events, assisting with development of our website and capturing video of our programs in action.

We loved having the students on our Smile Crew for the Fall 2019 semester! A new round of interns will start up with us in February 2020 to assist with our Wear Your Heart on Your Sleeve month and to observe in the field with our music therapist.
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