

A LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE FOR CENTRAL FLORIDA'S MODERN PARENTS

PLAYGROUND

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> holiday
issue!

Local Charities and
the Parents
Who Started Them

A Fashionable
Gift Guide

Holiday
Events



LOOK FOR THE

Helpers

These local parents have turned heartache into hope by establishing nonprofit organizations dedicated to helping families.

When asked about their greatest needs, almost every organization cited the same things: volunteers, funds, advocacy, and awareness.

Reach out to one of these worthy organizations! They're working to make a difference in the lives of kids and families in our area. See how you can be one of the helpers.

Words by **Lisa A. Beach** | Photos by **Jessica Friend**



LISA BEACH is a local mom, freelance journalist, content marketing specialist and copywriter. Check out her writer's website at www.LisaBeachWrites.com.

The Finley Project



Noelle Moore

MISSION:

Taking care of grieving moms in the minutes, days and years after infant loss.

After preparing for the arrival of her first-born child, Noelle Moore's world came crashing down on her. She endured 30 hours of labor and an emergency C-section, then watched her daughter, Finley, cling to life for 27 days following medical complications. When doctors declared Finley brain dead, the new parents made the heart-wrenching decision to remove their baby from life support. Numbly, she walked out of the hospital thinking, "Now what?"

Compounding the overwhelming grief of losing her only child, Noelle was also still dealing with the death of her father a few months earlier. The final emotional blow? Noelle's husband left her just a few weeks after losing Finley.

"I was shocked at the gap between the hospital and the home," recalls Noelle. "I couldn't believe I had to figure out how to deal with my daughter's death and not have someone come alongside me [who] had walked in my shoes."

After stumbling through her own grief, Noelle launched **The Finley Project** in 2014, realizing that moms need support from the moment they lose their infant.

The nonprofit provides a free, holistic approach that addresses the emotional, spiritual and physical needs of women who've experienced infant loss. The program includes assistance with funeral planning, meal and grocery gift cards, professional house cleaning, massage therapy, support group placement and individual professional counseling. Notably, the nonprofit pairs each mom with a volunteer (most of whom have also lost a child) who supports them for the next five years.

THE FINLEY PROJECT DETAILS

FOUNDED	2014 by Noelle Moore
NEEDS	Gift cards to local stores; volunteers with similar grief experiences; volunteers at the 5th Annual Celebration of Life Gala on July 21, 2018.
NEWS	The Finley Project aims to be in all 50 states now that it has national partners.
CONTACT	608 Waverly Ln., Maitland, 407-463-7576, thefinleyproject.org

New Hope for Kids



Dave Joswick

MISSION:

Bring hope, healing and happiness to children and families suffering from grief, loss or life-threatening illness.

In 1994, a group of board members from Hospice of Central Florida, including Dave Joswick, started researching how to provide grief support services to children. Spurred by the death of Dave's 16-year-old son, John, in 1986, the board saw the impact this loss had on the entire family and the need for support through the grief process. The result? They merged the Hospice of Central Florida with Children's Wish Foundation, creating a new stand-alone nonprofit, now called **New Hope for Kids**.

Dave points to a study on grief, which found that criminal behavior is often triggered by loss. "That's been a driving force for launching New Hope," says Dave. "I ran into so many stories of kids who lost someone and afterwards took a wrong turn in life."

New Hope offers two primary programs to the community. The Center for Grieving Children helps approximately 300 children and their families cope with significant grief related to a death through a variety of healing activities. "Kids typically withdraw when they're grieving," says Dave. But the grief program includes age-appropriate, creative play that engages kids and helps them share in a pressure-free environment. "Kids become therapists for each other," he says.

The Wishes for Kids program grants about 24 wishes each year to children (up to the age 19) diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. "Chronic illness often leaves a family with little time or finances to accommodate a child's special wish," notes Dave. "We provide a once-in-a-lifetime experience that families will remember forever."

NEW HOPE FOR KIDS DETAILS

FOUNDED	1996 by six board members from Hospice of Central Florida
NEEDS	Monetary donations; volunteers to work with children; donations/volunteers at fundraising events; donations of art supplies, individual servings of water/soda/juice, cookies, paper goods, gift cards to local stores/restaurants
NEWS	New Hope for Kids aims to start a young adult grief program.
CONTACT	544 Mayo Ave., Maitland, 407-331-3059, newhopeforkids.org

Give Kids the World Village



Pam Landwirth

MISSION:

Provide respite for children with life-threatening illnesses and their families by treating them to a weeklong, cost-free vacation in Central Florida.

Back in the 1980s, a young girl with leukemia wanted to visit Orlando's theme parks. Someone contacted Henri Landwirth, a successful hotelier, to provide complimentary lodging for the girl and her family, which he was happy to do. Unfortunately, it took so long to solidify the rest of the girl's travel plans that she passed away before her wish could be fulfilled. Motivated by this child's unfulfilled desire, Henri never wanted to see this happen again.

"It was taking the wish-granting organizations two to three months to make arrangements for park tickets, accommodations, meals and transportation," said Henri's ex-wife and dear friend Pam Landwirth, the nonprofit's president and CEO.

Tapping into his network of contacts in the hospitality and tourism industries, Henri created **Give Kids the World** in 1986 to fulfill these theme park wishes of critically ill children. "He streamlined it so all the wish-granting organization needs to do is call us," explains Pam. "We've never turned down a child in 31 years."

The program grew so popular that by 1989, Henri and his network created Give Kids the World Village, a 31-acre resort where children and families stay while visiting nearby theme parks. The village has since expanded to 84 acres with 168 family villas, entertainment, a swimming pool, ice cream shop, movie theater, miniature golf, train, carousel and a slate of fun activities for children of all abilities as well as their siblings and parents.

GIVING KIDS THE WORLD VILLAGE DETAILS

FOUNDED	1986 by Henri Landwirth
NEEDS	Volunteers to fill 1,800 slots every week; donations volunteers at fundraising events such as Challenge for Hope 5K and Annual Black & White Gala
NEWS	Give Kids the World Village is rebuilding its Ice Cream Palace and renaming it Henri's Starlight Scoop to honor its founder, who owned Cocoa Beach's Starlight Motel.
CONTACT	210 South Bass Rd., Kissimmee, 407-396-1114, gktw.org

Nathaniel's Hope



MISSION:

Share hope with kids with special needs and their families.

In 1997, Tim and Marie Kuck welcomed their third child, Nathaniel, into their family. Born prematurely with multiple special needs, Nathaniel spent his first 89 days fighting for his life in the hospital. At home, he required round-the-clock care. The family's days became filled with surgeries, therapies, and hospital visits until Nathaniel passed away at just 4½ years old.

"Nathaniel's Hope started because of the life and death of our son," explains Marie, the nonprofit's co-founder and executive director. "He brought us into a community that was very foreign to us, and to be honest, one that we preferred not to be a part of."

The Kucks were stretched thin trying to raise two little girls while caring for Nathaniel. While the parents acknowledged they were blessed with what they refer to as "the five Fs"—faith, family, friends, finances and flexibility—they were barely surviving. It made them wonder how less fortunate families were able to make it.

This unanticipated journey inspired the Kucks to found **Nathaniel's Hope** so they could provide hope and practical assistance to kids with special needs and their families. These VIP kids are affected by physical, cognitive and medical disabilities and chronic or life-threatening illnesses.

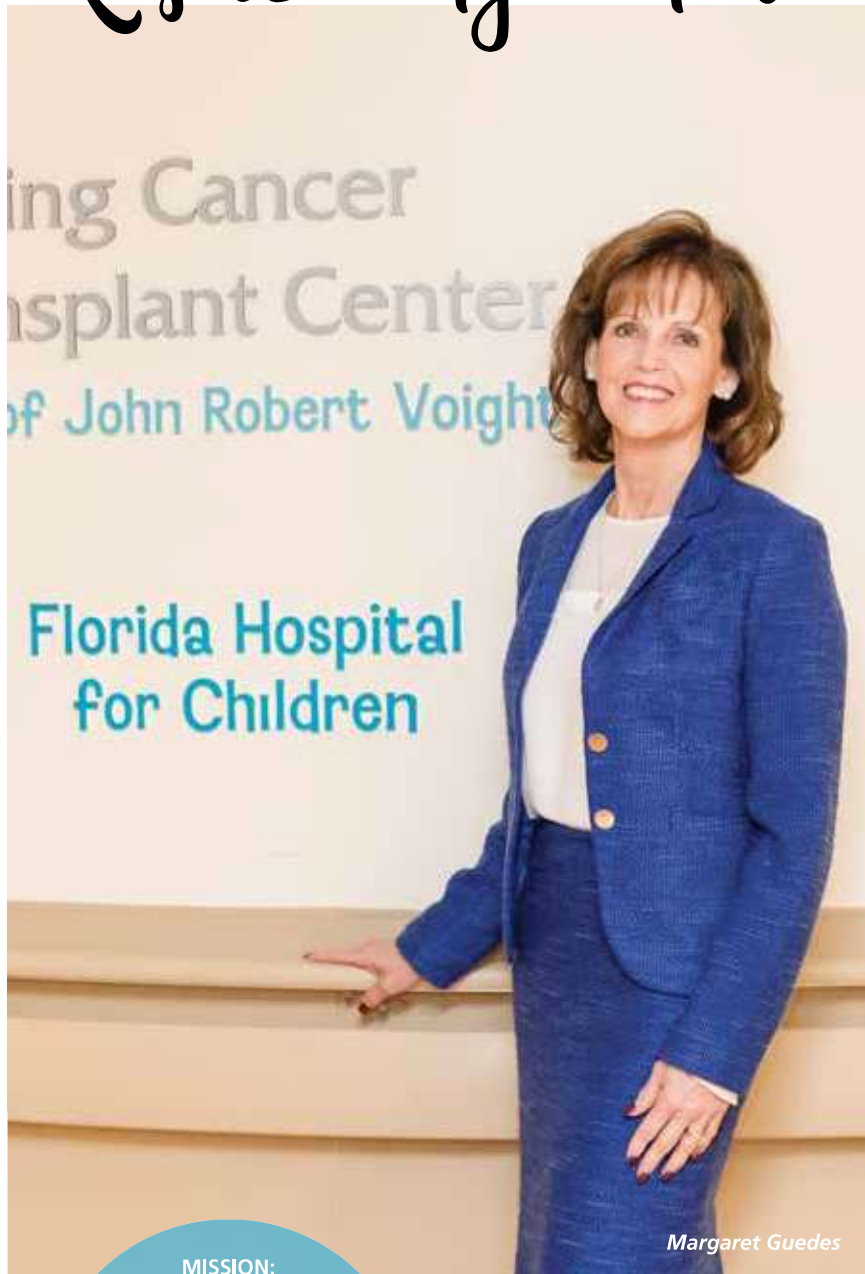
The annual Make 'm Smile event, dubbed "the biggest birthday party for kids with special needs," drew more than 50,000 guests in 2017. The yearly Christmas program gifts toys to VIP kids who are homebound or in the hospital. Buddy Break offers a much-needed day of respite for parents and caregivers.

"We also educate and equip the community with ways to assist VIP kids and their families," Marie points out. "We want to build a bridge of friendship and serve as a connecting point."

NATHANIEL'S HOPE DETAILS

FOUNDED	2002 by Tim and Marie Kuck
NEEDS	Volunteers who enjoy working with special needs populations; corporate partners; donations/volunteers at Christmas cheer events such as Nathaniel's Toy Shop (December) and 16th Annual Make 'm Smile Festival (June 2, 2018)
NEWS	Nathaniel's Hope aims to address some of the unmet needs for services and respite for the adult community as the children grow up and "age out" of special needs programs.
CONTACT	2300 Jetport Dr., Orlando, 407-857-8224, NathanielsHope.org

Kids Beating Cancer



Often, a tragedy spawns someone to take positive action. That's what happened to Orlando mom Margaret Guedes. While pregnant with her third child in 1988, Margaret learned that her first-born child, 5-year-old John, had leukemia. To receive proper treatment, Margaret had to leave Central Florida (with her two boys and newborn daughter) so John could get a bone marrow transplant in Seattle.

The experience ripped her family apart, as Margaret and the kids traveled back and forth to Seattle for the next four years seeking treatment. After nine-year-old John passed away, Margaret vowed to make treatment more accessible to Central Florida children with life-threatening diseases. Just a few months later, Margaret launched **Kids Beating Cancer** in 1992.

The nonprofit provides top-notch medical services, helping more than 8,500 children with life-threatening diseases and testing 37,000 potential bone marrow and stem cell donors since its inception. It reached a milestone in 2012 when it opened its eight-bed Pediatric Transplant Center at Florida Hospital for Children.

"Treatments we've never had before, we now can do. This is a gift to the Central Florida community and beyond," says Margaret.

In addition to medical care, Kids Beating Cancer provides financial and emotional support throughout the treatment process. It pays for meals while families visit their children in the hospital. It provides themed sheets, bedding and pajamas to make sterile hospital rooms feel more like home. It gives children and families free tickets to local attractions to provide respite from all the "medical stuff." Most notably, the staff provides a hands-on support system to help the entire family during this difficult journey.

MISSION:

Help children in need of marrow and stem cell transplantation and provide resources and support for children with life-threatening diseases and their families.

KIDS BEATING CANCER DETAILS

FOUNDED	1992 by Margaret Guedes
NEEDS	Corporate/workplace giving programs; sponsor a patient's room at the KBC Pediatric Transplant Center; donate items to decorate patients' rooms; volunteer at annual Hats & Heroes Ball (September)
NEWS	Kids Beating Cancer aims to double the number of beds in its transplant center.
CONTACT	228 E. Winter Park St., Orlando 407-894-2888, kidsbeatingcancer.com

Runway to Hope



Josie and Mark NeJame

MISSION:

Provide direct support and aid to Central Florida's children and their families impacted by pediatric cancer.

Be-coming a parent shifts your perspective, especially when you've got healthy kids and you run into a lot of parents who aren't so lucky. Attorney Mark NeJame and his wife, Josie, parents of two pre-teen daughters, met many such families after chairing pediatric cancer events.

"All these parents had the same experience—nobody ever thought it could happen to them," recalls Josie.

Mark adds, "The combination of Josie and I being service-oriented, having a greater awareness with our own kids and the influence of my mother (who worked in pediatric cancer) — all of that put us in the right place at the right time."

The right time was in 2010, when the NeJames launched **Runway to Hope** to fund research, treatment and care for Central Florida children fighting cancer. Their mission was to provide direct support and aid to children and families impacted by pediatric cancer. The nonprofit partnered with Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children, Florida Hospital for Children, and Nemours Children's Hospital to foster collaborative efforts among corporations, local businesses, and philanthropists to raise funds and awareness and to bring new programs and initiatives to the pediatric cancer community.

Through its Family Assistance Program, the nonprofit also provides direct financial support to families impacted by childhood cancer to ease their financial burdens. Families often receive gas cards, restaurant gift cards and money to pay their regular bills.

The nonprofit holds an annual fundraising gala, which has so far raised \$6 million. Mirroring a fashion show, children battling cancer parade down the runway with celebrities to wild applause. They're pampered with VIP treatment, including shopping, hairstyling and makeup. These pint-sized (and teen) models are truly the stars of the night.

RUNWAY TO HOPE DETAILS

FOUNDED	2010 by Mark and Josie NeJame
NEEDS	Monetary donations for research/treatment/care programs and Family Assistance Program; corporate partners; volunteers at events such as Beauty & Boys Bash (April), Spring Fashion Soiree (May)
NEWS	Pledges will start funding new initiatives such as the pediatric palliative care program at Arnold Palmer Hospital, the pediatric oncology floor at Florida Hospital for Children and the interventional radiology program at Nemours.
CONTACT	189 S. Orange Ave., Ste. 1800, Orlando 407-802-1544, runwaytohope.org