We’re grateful to the Child Life Specialists who lovingly serve HopeKids children, and who refer new families to our program.

Kim Froehle knew she wanted to be a Child Life Specialist the moment she read a pamphlet in her high school guidance counselor’s office.

“People say all the time: ‘How can you work as a Child Life Specialist?’,“ Kim said. “I tell them, ‘Come with me for a week and you won’t want to leave.’”

Kim is one of approximately 20 Child Life Specialists at Phoenix Children’s Hospital. Her job is in the Outpatient Cancer and Blood Disorders Clinic. Child Life services aren’t billed, but hospitals offer them because of the proven value of supporting patients for the duration of their medical journey.

As a cancer survivor, Kim remembers the overwhelming thoughts and feelings but today, she believes cancer was a blessing because it helped her be more sensitive to her patient’s needs.

“When I meet a child and a family, they’re so afraid,” Kim said. “They don’t have to say a word. They’re scared. They look at you like, ‘What do we have to do?’”

Kim’s tender presence and steady smile help her earn trust. She also has a “no surprises” approach. With the help of Quackers the duck, Kim can educate a child about his port, surgery, needles and chemotherapy—so there are no surprises with what’s ahead.

Nine-year-old Liana Gold was introduced to Kim and Quackers a few weeks after her diagnosis of Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. Her mom, Mazal, admits she was initially skeptical that a stuffed duck with a port would help Liana understand.

“Believe me, it actually works,” Mazal said. “Kim explained the whole process, and made it easy for Liana. I was kind of speechless.”

Visits with Kim are a regular part of Liana’s treatment. They address questions, discuss next steps, and recap highlights. In a recent visit, Kim listened intently while Liana shared her excitement about attending the Junie B. Jones musical with HopeKids.

Kim acknowledges challenges in her job. However, she feels it’s important for people to understand the inspiration she receives from the children she serves.

“The kids aren’t walking around depressed and crying,” Kim said. “For the most part, there is so much to love. They’re all our kids and we want to make [life] positive for all of them.”
Following their siblings’ cancer diagnosis....

59% of children showed new externalizing behaviors such as acting out at home or school, fighting, drug use, increased sibling rivalry and lower frustration tolerance.9

26% showed new internalizing behaviors such as worry, anxiety, depression, sleeping or eating problems.9

$54,270 Mean per-patient annual direct cost of Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Seven to 16 times higher than the mean per-capita health expenditure in the U.S.8

Why HopeKids?

Each year in the United States, approximately 500,000 children cope with life-threatening medical conditions1. These conditions affect the entire family with more than half of parents suffering from acute stress disorders2 and 80% of siblings having elevated levels of posttraumatic stress3. In addition, illnesses contribute to over 62% of bankruptcy filings each year4. More than $800 million is spent on medical research annually to find cures for cancer or other diseases but these families need support now. Numerous studies show that hope can increase one’s overall ability to cope5 and that familial support in chronically ill children is vital6. HopeKids understands we are not a cure for these illnesses, but we believe HOPE is a powerful medicine.

Adolescent [siblings of children with cancer] who have low social support tended to be perceived as being more anxious and having more behaviour problems than adolescents with high social support.”11

42% of patients report a significant or catastrophic financial burden of cancer10

68% cut back on leisure activities10

46% reduced spending on food and clothing10

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“Austin had the biggest smile on his face all day today and we had such a great time.”

“Izak has been very sick lately so this outing was something he was really looking forward to.”

MEET Christiano

17-year-old Christiano loves acting, watching movies, writing poetry and hanging out with friends. He was diagnosed several years ago with a spinal cord syndrome.

“HopeKids has been a part of our lives for years. So many times it was the only thing that kept Christiano going. We have made many friends and memories. Years ago it was hard for Christiano to go out in public. He would cry if he had to go to the store with me, but he would always want to go to a HopeKids event. It was at an event (Peter Pan at Theater Works) that Christiano became interested in acting. He did 16 stage plays and now is doing film and loves it!” - Christiano’s mom, Cindie