

nathaniel's  
hope

how to make a difference



Courtesy: Nathaniel's Hope

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By Angela White



Courtesy: Nathaniel's Hope



Nathaniel Kuck  
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Money is tight, expenses are on the rise, and time is precious. These are things we all know to be true, but imagine that you are the caregiver of a child with special needs and how that compounds these already difficult circumstances. One Orlando based family has been through more than their share of heartache and trials, but have come out the other side with a renewed sense of purpose and passion. Marie and Tim Kuck suffered a devastating blow when their son Nathaniel passed away at only four years old due to several illnesses. Throughout this heartbreaking time in their lives, the family has managed to somehow grow closer together. In 2002, following Nathaniel's death, the couple began a non-profit organization called Nathaniel's Hope to help support other families with struggles similar to their own. Marie now refers to herself as a "mom on a mission," and the memory of her son is what drives her to keep moving forward!

Nathaniel's Hope offers programs, encouragement and support to families with children who have either a physical, cognitive, medical or hidden disability, chronic or life-threatening illness, or those who are medically fragile, referred to as VIP kids. Marie says she learned an important lesson from her son, that every life has value and purpose and there are no accidents. "Though Nathaniel could never walk, talk, or eat with his mouth like other kids, he taught us so much, and today he is touching thousands of lives." Through Nathaniel's Hope, Marie is trying to reach thousands of families in need of respite and also educate the public about children with special needs. Volunteers are also an important part of the organization.

Tim and Marie know first-hand how difficult it is to care for a child with serious medical anomalies. "Families who have VIP kids have the same basic needs as all families, but often because of the unique challenges they face, they live in a world that is isolated from the rest. We need to do our best to reach out, be a friend and assist them any way possible." Because of their personal experience, they have developed programs through Nathaniel's Hope to support these families including the VIP Birthday Club, Buddy Break, Make 'm Smile, and Caroling for Kids.

The National VIP Birthday Club program is an effort to reach out to VIP kids and celebrate them. Once a child is enrolled, he/she will receive a "Bearing Hope" beanie bear, a special birthday card, and cards and surprises on other holidays throughout the year. Children can also have their pictures and story posted online. Every member of the Kuck family is involved (even Nathaniel's grandma) in all aspects of the foundation. Ashley, their 13 year old daughter, designs the special birthday cards, which Annette (Grandma) signs personally. Brianna, who is 15, takes part in the various outreach events or helps in the office. Tim plays a major role in planning and development, as well as speaking on behalf of the organization at public events. "They put a lot of hours in behind the scenes," says Marie.

The Buddy Break program is designed to provide caregivers of

## MEET THE FAMILY

VIP kids a well-deserved break for three hours on either a Friday night or Saturday morning. Local churches partner with Nathaniel's Hope each month to provide a safe place for the Buddy Break program. As Marie explains from experience, "Care giving is often overwhelming for VIP families. It is generally a 24/7 job with little opportunity for rest."

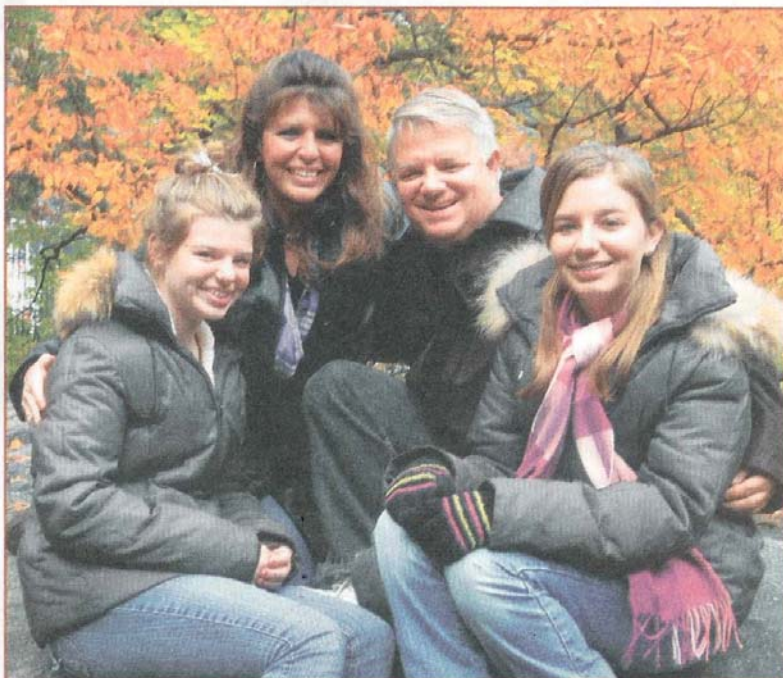
Make 'm Smile is an annual event that takes place in downtown Orlando (around Lake Eola) the first Saturday of June to commemorate Nathaniel's birthday (June 6th). The community wide event, being held this year on June 7th, features a Buddy Stroll where VIP kids are partnered with other children, families and individuals (Buddies) for a friendly stroll around the lake. The event is FREE and includes entertainment, food, family activities, as well as theme park characters and local exhibitors that serve the special needs community. The goal of this outreach is to celebrate VIP kids and their families, while educating other children that VIP kids are just like them, so they can find ways to reach out and make a difference to children with special needs.

The Caroling for Kids event started as a result of Nathaniel being admitted to the hospital on his first Christmas. Volunteers visit local children's hospitals on Christmas Day so everyone can enjoy caroling, prayer and goodies that are provided by Nathaniel's Hope. "Last year over 500 people participated on sixteen caroling teams, and visited ten locations," says Marie. The message being brought to patients and families through Caroling for Kids is one of hope and encouragement.

Marie encourages everyone to do whatever they can, no matter how small, to support families with special needs children. "There are plenty of ways to get involved in a VIP families' life without spending money such as being a buddy, inviting a VIP kid to your home or playgroup, bringing pizza over and watching a movie. If you can't take care of the child, you can take care of the caregiver by picking up groceries



Courtesy: Nathaniel's Hope



Courtesy: Kuck Family

or preparing a meal to allow them some spare time." Your circumstances can lead you toward your purpose in life even when they are difficult. "Nathaniel brought us into a community that we initially did not want to be a part of, but once we were there, we couldn't leave. It is a privilege to serve these kids and their families," explains Marie.

The Kuck family would like to thank the numerous volunteers who already support Nathaniel's Hope, knowing that without them this ministry couldn't continue. Anyone can volunteer with Nathaniel's Hope simply by coming to the programs/events, or making cookies or ornaments to share with families at Christmas time, or helping in the office. Remember, every little bit makes an impact in someone's life!

## get involved

You can get involved and help change the lives of VIP kids and their families by contacting Marie and Tim through Nathaniel's Hope. For more information, visit [www.nathanielshope.org](http://www.nathanielshope.org).