

# Nathaniel's Hope

By Mark J. Goldstein

**N**athaniel Timothy Kuck was born June 6, 1997 prematurely with multiple birth anomalies. Surgeries, therapies, sickness and hospital visits were a regular part of his life. Beating the odds time and again overcoming many physical obstacles and challenges, Nathaniel went to be with the Lord on November 13, 2001 at the young age of four and a half.

Nathaniel's Hope was founded in 2002 by Nathaniel's parents, Tim and Marie Kuck, to meet the needs of kids with special needs (VIP Kids) and their families. VIP Kids are those with any physical, cognitive, medical or hidden disability, chronic or life-threatening illness, or those that are medically fragile. Through their experience, Tim and Marie saw first-hand how demanding it can be to raise a child with special needs.

Programs offered by Nathaniel's Hope are designed to: reduce stress for the special needs kids and their families; share hope and encouragement; provide education to empower individuals in the community to reach out to special needs families. Some of these programs are the Buddy Break, Make 'm Smile, and Keep 'm Smiling.

The Buddy Break was created to provide respite care for families who have little or no support system to give them a break when they need it the most.

Make 'm Smile was originated in 2002 from the Kuck's desire to commemorate Nathaniel's birthday while sharing joy with other special needs kids. One of the unique features of this annual event is a "buddy stroll", where VIP families are buddied up with people from the community. Typically held on the first weekend of June, the event will take place at Lake Eola this year on July 14th. It was rescheduled due to tropical storm Barry.

Many times it is logistically difficult for families with VIP Kids to enjoy community activities and events. Keep 'm Smiling is a program where event planners make provisions so that these families can be welcomed to attend activities and events.

Since 2002, Nathaniel's Hope has helped 1208 families representing 1678 VIP Kids. Tim and Marie do it all because of Nathaniel. They say, "His memory will always be cherished and his little handprints and lessons he taught us will be imprinted on our hearts forever. We miss the 'little man's' smile and his presence in our home, but the memory of his life propels us to fulfill God's purpose after his death." They continue,

"Through his death, we hope to bring encouragement and life to others."

To learn more about Nathaniel's Hope visit [www.nathanielshope.org](http://www.nathanielshope.org), or call (407) 857-8224. **LU**

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