Out of Sadness; Extraordinary Kindness

Camp’s incredible community came together in an overwhelming show of support following the fire that destroyed Downtown Camp.

On the evening of February 12, 2021, the unthinkable happened when a fire broke out at Camp, and destroyed the iconic buildings that housed Arts & Crafts, Woodshop, the Cooking Zone and Camp Store. For 90 minutes, local firefighters and state troopers battled the blaze, facing challenging conditions caused by the cold and snow that covered Camp. And their extraordinary efforts prevented even more damage, saving the Dining Hall and Infirmary.

Camp Director Alan “Pendo” Pender was first to the scene, calling 911 and helping in any way he could. Watching the destruction of those beloved buildings, home to so much joy and so many memories, was heartbreaking.

“What I remember most was the ferocity and the speed at which the fire spread,” Pendo said. “It was so hot, even from 30 feet away, and I just had this helpless feeling while I was waiting for the fire department to arrive. I knew they weren’t going to be able to save those buildings, but I was really worried about the Dining Hall because the fire was spreading so quickly. The Fire Department was amazing.”

Arts & Crafts, Woodshop and the Cooking Zone were where our campers’ creativity could always shine. It was here that an idea could become reality amid smells of sawdust, smears of paint and puffs of flour. For so many in our camper families, these were sacred spaces, where new friends could gather, campers could collaborate and keepsakes were created. And while the loss of these buildings has impacted so many, the spirit that filled them remains.

Then out of the sadness, something extraordinary happened. Messages of love and support came from every corner of the Camp community — and beyond. Donations started pouring in and long-standing Camp friends Travelers and the Travelers Championship stepped forward, pledging an astounding $1 million match to inspire those in the community to help rebuild Camp. The match was met in just one week, and to date, Camp has received more than 4,000 donations from generous friends — old and new. It was a testament to the incredible loyalty of the Camp family and also the far-reaching good will that the magic of Hole in the Wall brings to others.

Newman’s Own Foundation also stepped forward in a significant and generous way, pledging an incredible $1 million to support the rebuild. With the gift came encouragement to dream big and rebuild in a way that would best meet the current, future and varied needs of the seriously Ill children the Camp serves – a challenge everyone at Camp has fully embraced.

“We are deeply grateful for the tremendous outpouring of kindness and generosity from the thousands of people who lifted our hearts following the devastating fire,” said Camp CEO Jimmy Canton. “We are honored and humbled by the friendship of everyone who donated, raised money or shared their well wishes. We also want to express our heartfelt thanks to Travelers, the Travelers Championship and to Newman’s Own Foundation. It is because of this incredible support that we can now focus our efforts on rebuilding these spaces.”

The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp’s original architect is currently finalizing the design plans, with groundbreaking planned for September 2021. And when campers and families arrive in June 2022, they will be greeted by an accessible and inclusive new program complex where love and laughter will once again fill the walls.

Until then, camper families will let their creativity shine this spring and summer under outdoor tents. Though it may look a little different, the magic of Hole in the Wall will still be there. If there is one thing this past year has reaffirmed, it’s that Camp is more than buildings. It is a spirit, and a community, and “a different kind of healing” can happen anywhere.
What’s New at Camp

Things at Camp continue to look a little different, with virtual and alternative programming continuing in a multitude of ways. However, hope is on the horizon, with the return to more and more in-person programming as well. The last several months have seen Camp’s Hospital Outreach Team safely return to more than half of Hole in the Wall’s partner hospitals, thanks in part to the vaccination of our HOP staff!

In addition, this spring we will be offering in-person Family Fun Days and Overnights, and this summer we will host eight four-day Family Camps! Each Fun Day and Overnight will safely welcome up to 8 families, while Family Camps will host up to 13 families, who will participate in parallel programming, hosted by a Family Guide. These individualized experiences will provide opportunities for families to connect and come back to a place that they love.

This summer, Camp will also be hosting virtual young adult programming specifically for former campers aged 16 – 18. The three-week program will provide participants with opportunities to learn about themselves and connect with others by combining elements of the Hero’s Journey®, Strides and Leader-in-Training programs. Participants will meet on Wednesday and Friday afternoons on Zoom to participate in activities, workshops, challenges and discussions focused on camaraderie, self-discovery and leadership.

And finally, we’re thrilled to share that construction on the Young Adult Lodge is now complete, and the space is fully outfitted, thanks to the generous donors who have prioritized this important population through their giving. This new home for our Leader in Training, Hero’s Journey and other Young Adult programs features indoor and outdoor gathering areas, residential spaces and offices, and is an important addition to our Camp facility.

From the CEO

Heartbreaking to heartwarming – that is probably the best way to describe the journey of emotions that the “Hole” community has experienced so far this year. But the fire that claimed our Downtown Camp program complex on February 12 could not destroy the unwavering spirit of hope and healing that define our Camp family. And we ARE a family. Only a family could come together in the aftermath of a tragedy and be strengthened by the unconditional love and kindness that unites us. Every person who donated, every camper family that raised money on social media, and everyone who prayed for us and sent their well wishes helped to lift Camp up and carry us all forward. And we were incredibly humbled by the friendship of so many new friends from all over the world, who came to our side during our time of need. And lastly, we remain forever grateful to Travelers, the Travelers Championship and Newman’s Own Foundation for their exceptional generosity – they are always in our corner and forever in our hearts. It is because of this incredible support – the support of our entire Camp family – that we can now fully focus our efforts on rebuilding. But we all know that the magic of Hole in the Wall is so much more than just buildings, and we are so excited for all the good things that lie ahead. We are absolutely thrilled not only to be resuming in-person Hospital Outreach programming at more and more of our partner locations, but look forward to hosting family programs at Camp this spring and eight four-day Family Camps this summer. Safety will continue to be at the forefront because it is still a very different time for “a different kind of healing.” But thankfully, there is hope on the horizon and so many joyful moments to look forward to thanks to the love and loyalty of friends like you.

Creative CORNER

Over the years, Arts & Crafts and Woodshop have been home to countless expressions of camper creativity – from T-shirts and pottery to birdhouses and boats. Those memories will live on forever as the next generation of campers bring their own dreams into the new space that will start being rebuilt this fall and open in time for summer 2022.
Family Flats
Stories from current and former camper families.
In her own words – by Camper Mom Mary Wootten

“Mom! How many more days until we go to The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp?” We had just held the annual and legendary Holiday Party. Now my kids began the countdowns for Rare Disease Family Weekend and summer camp. As soon as we pull away from Camp, the question is asked. And it doesn’t stop until the morning we arrive for Camp, when it changes to “how many more minutes, and how many more seconds until we get there, because it’s just taking too long”?

This is what happens when camp doesn’t feel like a camp but a home. Home is your safe place, where you are accepted for who you are — no questions asked. The place where you don’t need to explain, or feel ashamed of your licks, your scars, your tubes coming out of you, your pumps beeping, or the constant need to stop what you are doing to take a rest, take medications, get tube feedings or injections, have a seizure or even a meltdown because you are just tired of feeling sick or crappy all day every day. All of the kids, and the grown-ups there, get it. My kids feel empowered when they are at Camp. They feel “normal” for the first time in months when with their Camp peers, and these experiences are incredibly invaluable to their sense of worth. They leave each visit changed for the better. Stronger in mind, body and soul, ready and recharged to face the real world once more. And for my daughter, a networking circle unlike any other, through texting, where they check in with each other, tell jokes, send pictures and lift each other up, until they meet again. My daughter can’t wait to ride the horses while at Camp. She has told us and her doctors that when she is riding, it is the only time ever that she is able to forget that she is in constant pain. My son loves to fish and be near the water. He loves to watch out for, and hear stories about, WeePeel For my sibling camper son, Camp gives him time to let loose and afford us as parents time to给他 extra attention to help him know that he is special too, as it’s easy for him to feel left out when his siblings require so much medically.

On a visit to Rare Disease Family Weekend, I observed a counselor interacting with my son during a particularly challenging time. I was at the end of my rope, and they handled us both with such compassion. When we talked about it after, they said something that really stuck with me: “We meet them where they are at.” Those seven words changed how I now handle moments like those. And it is exactly what my son needs. For me to get on the floor with him for a while, instead of telling him to get up. We have experienced Rare Disease Family Weekend, Summer Camp, Parent Volunteer Day (gone to Camp to help out!), Parent and Caregiver Retreats (both attending and as Host Parents), Holiday Party, Virtual Parent Meetings, CampOut, and the Fall Craft Mailing Series during COVID.

There are really no words to express how deeply grateful we are for Paul Newman, for the volunteers and staff, and for the generous donors that make Camp possible. The profound joy, memories and life lessons we have experienced thus far are well beyond measure. They leave each visit changed for the better. Stronger in mind, body and soul, ready and recharged to face the real world once more.

On a cold Friday in February, a group of moms from the Boston area gathered together on Zoom for a painting lesson with Hole in the Wall’s Hospital Outreach Program (HOP)™. HOP has partnered with Fuentes de Luz at Boston Children's Hospital to offer these monthly workshops where caregivers can share resources, relax and connect with others who are dealing with similar challenges.

“We started Fuentes de Luz about six or seven years ago for caregivers who were feeling overwhelmed,” said Cecilia Matos, Program Coordinator, Hale Family Center for Families at Boston Children’s Hospital. “Including the painting workshops has been a great opportunity for families to share in an experience and really relax. That was something they really needed.”

For over an hour, the moms painted mountains, rivers, grass and flowers, led by Boston HOP regional manager Kevin Rice, while lead HOP specialist Jimmy Guity got the participants laughing with some trivia questions — all shared in Spanish and tailored for an audience primarily hailing from Latin America. Laughter echoed over Zoom while moms proudly shared their artwork and their children darted on and off the screens in the background. Though the women never discussed the specifics of their children’s illnesses, the connection was apparent, and support for each other clear.

“To be able to take the time to breathe and forget everything for the moment brought tears of happiness to my eyes,” shared a participant. “It has been too many years since I have been able to do this.”

The paint nights with Fuentes de Luz are one of several virtual parent programs that HOP is currently offering across multiple regions. Though it is unique in the Spanish-speaking audience it serves, it is much like the others in offering family support at a time when hospital resources are stretched even more than usual. It is a much needed resource for caregivers, who are now isolated not only because of their child’s diagnosis, but also because of the limitations the pandemic has left us all experiencing.

“We started giving a private space for parents and caregivers in the hospital to connect and create years ago,” Kevin said. “But when families go home from the hospital, they are still dealing with a child with serious illness and can feel a sense of isolation. So, during the pandemic our HOP team has created kits for Boston Children’s Hospital to send to families at home. The existing Fuentes de Luz group was a great fit for us, and we will keep joining through Zoom, even when we are fully back in the hospital. We will also continue bi-monthly Camp for the Caregiver events in the hospital for anyone who wants to get in on the Camp fun.”

If you’d like to learn more about HOP, please contact Michele “Gill” McKenna, Director, Hospital Outreach, at michele.mckenna@holeinthewallgang.org, or visit www.holeinthewallgang.org/hospitaloutreach.
Eleven-year-old Victoria first came to Hole in the Wall in the summer of 2018, and had an amazing time swimming in the pool and making new friends. As a child with sickle cell disease, she isn't often able to swim because a cold pool can cause her to go into sickle cell crisis. But at Camp, she didn't have to worry about that at all with the heated pool and toasty gazebo. She was so excited to return to Camp in 2020, but then the in-person summer program was cancelled.

“I was so sad because Camp is really fun and a place where people like me can go and be yourself because people get you,” Victoria said.

When the family found out about the mailing series opportunity for the alternative summer program, they jumped at the chance, and Victoria signed up to be a part of the STEM mailing series. It wasn't just an opportunity for her to be a part of Camp again, but a way for her to take her mind off of everything that was going on at the time.

“The mailing series really kept us busy and gave her good memories,” her mom Nicole said. “She still wraps herself up all day in the quilt that came in her first box and wears her Camp shirt all the time.”

The family signed up this spring to be a part of the Hasbro mailing series, and they are loving all the games and goodies they’ve received. But most of all, Victoria loves getting packages in the mail with her name on them.

“Victoria complains that all she ever gets in the mail are packages with her medication in it,” Nicole said. “But getting the packages from Camp makes her feel really good.”

Colby first came to a Rare Disease Family Camp because of his shyness in new situations, he had a great time, well before and was looking forward to returning in June. For an hour, he was cheered up playing CampOut specialist Bailey Horton. Each playtime with Colby coming out on top. So it was especially exciting for him when he received three different packages filled with games and crafts. For Colby, who is still primarily at home, he gets so excited when a package arrives and out of the hospital multiple times over.

“He’s had no energy and has just stayed in the hospital. And this past fall, Colby joined the Rare Disease Family CampOut specialist Bailey Horton. Each playtime with Colby coming out on top. So it was especially exciting for him when he received three different packages filled with games and crafts. For Colby, who is still primarily at home, he gets so excited when a package arrives and out of the hospital multiple times over.

“Colby keeps talking about going to Camp this summer. “I can’t even get him to leave his room, so for him, you can’t imagine how happy he would be to get packages from CampOut.”
From Unknown to Unstoppable

In September 2019, Hole in the Wall’s Hospital Outreach Program (HOP™) began serving Nemours/A.I. duPont Hospital for Children in Wilmington, Delaware, with both bedside visits and programming in the outpatient clinic. The relationship was new and exciting, and just what the hospital was looking for.

“I’d seen the incredible power of Camp firsthand when I was a part of The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia,” said Jennifer Sciolla, senior director of child and family services, Delaware Valley, at duPont. “Knowing how children and families find so much joy in the activities, I was so excited for HOP to start at duPont.”

But just six short months later, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, sending everyone into lockdown. HOP programming, like all other programming at Hole in the Wall at the time, pivoted to alternative expressions. Virtual bedside visits and playgroups, along with newsletters and videos filled with fun activities, brought the magic of HOP to patients across all partner hospitals.

Slowly, programming has returned to the hospitals, starting with in-studio programming. At duPont, HOP specialists Rob Crowthers and Julie Edwards have been taking over the hospital’s closed-circuit studio for an hour each week to broadcast interactive games and shows directly to televisions in rooms, where patients can call into the studio for the chance to win a prize.

Over the weeks, the dynamic duo created hospital content like: The Masked Singer, Matching Games, Word Scrambles, Mind Sweeper and more. At first, patients at duPont were reluctant to call in, but soon the phone was ringing off the hook.

Each week, patients are tuning in to see what fun Rob and Julie have in store for them. Even better, as the two have returned to in-person programming at bedsides, patients are so excited to see them in their rooms.

HOP brings the fun right to patient rooms during live in-studio programming streamed through hospital closed circuit television.

While dealing with health challenges at home, Colby was able to find connection and fun through virtual CampOut visits and mailing series.

great having that time with CampOut.”

…but soon the phone was ringing off the hook.
Our Events
Highlights of our latest benefit events and those to come…

What’s to Come in 2021!

What do you get when you combine three of Camp’s biggest fundraising events – the Beantown Bash, Big Apple Bash and Fandango Benefit Gala – into one mega event? A one-of-a-kind virtual celebration for all! Join us online on Sunday, September 12, 2021 at 7 p.m. for an inspirational evening featuring Hole in the Wall campers, families and celebrity friends.

Many Hearts, One Dream: A “Hole” Celebration of Camp Magic, will be streamed via our website and delivered safely and directly into the homes of Camp friends new and old. With incredible musical performances, uplifting camper stories and plenty of surprises in store, the event is one not to be missed!

Leading up to the show, be sure to visit www.holeinthewallgang.org/manyhearts for fun stories, updates about performers and much more! If you had the opportunity to watch last year’s show, you know what a magical event that was, and this year, with the inclusion of the Big Apple Bash and Beantown Bash communities, it promises to be even bigger and better. And to make this year’s combined virtual celebration all the more special, we will be presenting the friends of the Beantown and Big Apple Bashes with Camp’s highest honor, the Most Wanted Award, in recognition of their collective support of Hole in the Wall for more than 25 years.

We look forward to seeing you at the Gala!

Since 2018, MassMutual has been a staunch supporter of a very special population at Camp – our Young Adults. The support comes from the company’s 340-employee strong ADAPT Business Resource Group (BRG), which focuses on expanding disability inclusion through cultural competency, education, accessibility and community involvement.

“MassMutual’s willingness not just to support Camp financially, but also to share their knowledge with our families, has been such a shining example of a meaningful corporate partnership,” said Miranda McCarthy, vice chair of the ADAPT BRG and volunteer at Camp. “Having the ability to support these former campers who are now young adults on their journey toward independence is an honor for us. It’s not every day we are specifically told to leave our suits at home, roll up our sleeves, and get dirty. The benefit we receive is to know that we’re helping children and families. With our financial and educational support, we’re able to inspire, help foster independence, and drive personal growth in these amazing kids. We’re proud of MassMutual’s talented employees and are glad that they can use their specific skills to give back to the community.”

If you’d like to learn more about becoming a corporate partner with Hole in the Wall, please contact Andrea Keefe at andrea.keefe@holeinthewallgang.org.
Amazing athletes wrangle opportunities for her son, she instead recommended him to Hole in the Wall.

“I got the very last spot on the team that year, and the rest is history” Mark said.

Since then, Mark has run the Boston Marathon four more times and the New York Marathon twice in support of Hole in the Wall. He is especially grateful and humbled for the opportunity to use his running as a way to give back, while being so encouraged in his efforts.

“Camp is a great organization that I really believe in,” he said. “Everyone is so supportive from start to finish and the programs are so good for the kids and their families. I have been blessed with good health and the ability to train, so what better way is there to give back?”

Mark is cautiously optimistic about being able to race in the year ahead and is putting in the miles now so he’ll be ready either way. Hole in the Wall, too, is cautiously optimistic about upcoming races and is currently fielding a team for this year’s TCS New York Marathon, taking place November 7. Right now, safety remains the top priority, and Camp will be doing everything it can to ensure a safe – and fun - experience for all participants.

If you’d like to join Mark and learn more about supporting Camp as a FUNraiser, please contact us at FUNraiser@holeinthewallgang.org.

“I have been blessed with good health and the ability to train, so what better way is there to give back?”

For a decade of summers, Maryanne Williams-Pitman has been a volunteer nurse and friend in Camp’s Infirmary, the OK Corral. Though initially searching for volunteer opportunities for her son, she instead found a fulfilling opportunity for herself and eventually her husband, Henry, too.

“I loved it from the beginning,” Maryanne said. “I didn’t know anybody, but everyone was so welcoming and pleasant.”

For the first several summers, Maryanne’s husband would drop her off and pick her up from her week volunteering. After a few years, he decided to try volunteering himself. He started with a Family Weekend. It went so well, he came for a week and had a great time.

“The kids blew me away,” Henry said. “I was just amazed by how wonderful and funny they were.”

Over the years, the duo have volunteered at Family Weekends, summer sessions and CampOut events in New York City. With each experience, they feel enriched.

“What I do for Camp is nothing compared to what Camp does for me,” Maryanne said. “I’ve never been around an organization that sticks to its mission statement like Camp. It’s a beautiful place to be, and the more contact I have with Camp, the better I feel.”

This has made this past year difficult for Maryanne and Henry, as their ability to volunteer was limited due to the pandemic. Despite quarantines and restrictions, the two continued to be involved, finding virtual opportunities to volunteer and support Hole in the Wall.

As the summer approaches, Maryanne, Henry and everyone at Camp are looking forward to the return to in-person programming. The experience promises to brighten not just the days of the families served but their own as well.

“When I drive through the gates, my heart lifts, and I am in a good place,” Henry said. “There is no place where I laugh as hard as at Camp.”

If you’d like to learn more about volunteering at Hole in the Wall visit www.holeinthewallgang.org/volunteer-opportunities or email our volunteer team at volunteers@holeinthewallgang.org.

It’s a beautiful place to be, and the more contact I have with Camp, the better I feel.”


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It's wonderful to have families back at Camp. We are looking forward to safely bringing even more families to Family Camps this summer!

Look inside to see how the community came to Camp's side during a difficult time.

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