

Oklahoma City Family Justice Center

Where Families Come First and Professionals Come Together



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Kim Garrett
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August 22, 2016

Suzanne Breedlove

VOCA

421 NW 13th Street, Suite 290

Oklahoma City, OK 73103

Dear Ms. Breedlove and the VOCA Board:

The Oklahoma City Family Justice Center was proud to partner with Camp HOPE America to launch its inaugural camp for kids from Oklahoma City July 24-30, 2016 at the YMCA's Camp Classen. 29 children ages 7-11 were referred to us from partner agencies and came to us with a lot of heartache and trauma. To qualify for camp you have to have witnessed domestic violence, however the majority of these children had also been victimized in many other unimaginable ways. Several talked about how they had been "choked out" by a parent, others had been raped, and one witnessed the murder of a sibling. Some had scars all over their bodies and some had been cognitively stunted. All of them had been profoundly impacted by violence.

Camp HOPE provides a fun weeklong camping experience, but it's much deeper than that. At camp we discussed important life lessons such as forgiveness, that our future is brighter than our past and that we all need each other. Daily we learned about hero's who had overcome difficult times and chosen to do good. Children were challenged with trust exercises, team building, rock climbing, yoga and more. We had great fun, but at times it was really difficult too. Many of these children have come from chaotic, unstable environments where they were terrorized and lived in fear daily. They don't feel safe to express their emotions and have not been taught healthy coping skills. So some would get angry, others had panic attacks, bedwetting and outbursts. A few children would suddenly run off and one logged several miles a day. But with every outburst and every step, a kind, caring and patient counselor was right beside them. Listening, supporting them and lifting them back up. These kids need people to believe in them.

Many of these children have been betrayed and hurt by the people they love the most, their parents. Many were severely abused and have spent years in foster care because their homes are not safe. Rebuilding trust with strangers and letting these kids know they are safe is a tough journey, but an important one. In just a few days at Camp, you could see a radical transformation, these precious kids had HOPE and their bond with their fellow campers was so strong they called them family. Each night campers gathered around to say where they saw hope in each other and how they saw hope in themselves. Oftentimes there were so many

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examples we couldn't get to everyone....A powerful reminder of children's resilient hearts and that with a little help, our future *can* be brighter than our past.

Camp HOPE has a profound impact on everyone. Counselors described it as: "magical", "transformative", "the most amazing experience of their life". Guided by Melissa Elder, our amazing Kid's HOPE Coordinator, she took 13 college aged counselors and 6 adult staff who volunteered an entire week (almost 150 hours each!) to help trauma exposed kids. Though at times it was a challenge, every single one of them said they will be back next year and are recruiting their friends to become counselors too. We are blessed to work with these amazing individuals and affectionately call our counselors **Hope Givers**.

Camp kids are at a critical crossroads in their lives. Soon their small bodies will grow and they could potentially use them to hurt others. Statistically, 78% of kids from violent homes will grow up and hurt their partner(s) and/or children. If they don't have a positive intervention and learn alternatives to violence, their futures could be very dark and destructive. Thankfully, [Camp HOPE helps kids change how this story ends and breaks the cycle of generational violence.](#)

With healthy role modeling, learning the power of choices and ongoing family support, these children's futures are undoubtedly brighter than their past. As one 11 year old camper said "This is the first time I've ever felt safe."

Seeing this program become a reality has undoubtedly been the highlight of my career and I am confident it is making a profound difference. THANK YOU for being a HOPE GIVER and believing in these kids, we could not have done this without your generous support! We are so grateful for you and look forward to many more great successes together.

In Hope,



Kim Garrett, LMSW, NACP
Project Director

*I appreciate
you SO
much!!*