



Catherine's Story

It was Christmas Eve 2009 when 5-month-old Catherine went for a wellness visit. The pediatrician noticed her "Buddha belly" and sent her for ultrasound tests. Two weeks later, Catherine was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, a cancer that affects mainly infants and young children. With this devastating news, her parents had to face the reality that Catherine's care and treatment meant that her mom would need to stop working; her dad would continue to work two jobs. Although they had health insurance, the loss of the second income impacted their ability to keep up with household bills. "Everything became too much and we didn't really know anyone who could help," recalls Catherine's father.

Through a hospital social worker, Catherine's parents learned about Friends of Karen. They met with Marla Krellenstein, one of our social workers, who helped organize paperwork and pay household and medical bills so they wouldn't fall behind. "Friends of Karen made it possible for us to keep from refinancing or facing foreclosure," says Catherine's father. During the treatment period, Marla kept in contact with phone calls and visits to make sure the family was getting what they needed and to offer encouragement. "Marla focused on the financial issues so that we could focus on Catherine."

There were many difficult days as Catherine's parents struggled through their worst nightmare. They created a blog to keep family and friends informed of Catherine's activities and progress – and included photos showing their little girl playing, discovering, and laughing.

"Knowing we had this caring and support helped guide us through a difficult journey. Friends of Karen made all the difference."

But it was no laughing matter for her anxious parents. Through the entire ordeal, Marla was always available to provide support. "She listened and cared about every detail, and I knew we could trust her," says Catherine's mother. One time, after a really bad day, the family returned home and found a gift package for Catherine from Friends of Karen. "It made us smile, and we really needed that!"

Catherine completed treatment in July and is doing well. She turned one this summer and enjoyed a huge birthday party. Because of the financial and emotional support that Friends of Karen provided, the family is able to resume their daily lives. As Catherine's dad puts it, "Knowing we had this caring and support helped guide us through a difficult journey. Friends of Karen made all the difference."

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Connecting With Communities

Friends of Karen Awarded Largest Team Trophy at 2010 Long Island Marathon

Standing at just over three feet tall, The Run for Charity Challenge trophy has a special place in Friends of Karen's Port Jefferson office, the crowning touch for having the largest team – 205 dedicated walkers and runners – in the Long Island Marathon's 32 year history.

Established in 2007 as the brainchild of Evelyn Anderson whose son, Luke, was diagnosed with Leukemia weeks after his first birthday, the **Walk/Run for Friends of Karen** has developed into a team of caring individuals from staff members, Friends of Karen families, to our most current partners – the corporate world.



(l to r) Judith Factor, Executive Director, Friends of Karen; Nancy Mariano, Regional Director, Friends of Karen; Nassau County Executive Edward P. Mangano

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Sheila Petersen (1938-1990)

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Friends of Karen is a not-for-profit organization.
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full extent of the law.



From Our Executive Director



“What is Friends of Karen all about?” I’m asked this question a dozen times each week. My quick answer is that ***we provide financial and emotional support for families caring for critically ill children.*** But what does this really mean?

Just imagine the shock of being told that your child has a life-threatening illness. None of us, no matter what our background or financial position, is prepared to navigate the world of childhood cancer, let alone cope with the fear, anxiety, and sadness that will overwhelm every family member. Think about it. Most children are in treatment for two to three years or more. What must this do to a family?

One mom aptly described Friends of Karen as a “safe place, a soft place to fall, like a pillow.” We really are! Friends of Karen has been helping families since 1978. Our wonderful social workers have the experience, dedication and know-how to support a family through their arduous journey.

We often talk about the financial assistance we provide to a family because it is tangible and easy to understand. Everyone grasps that when you have a seriously ill child, one or both parents must stop working to be by their child’s bedside, available to make critical medical decisions. A family’s income plummets just as illness-related expenses soar. That’s when Friends of Karen steps in to pay the rent, utilities, childcare, medical co-pays, and necessities to stabilize a family and assure they remain intact and in their home.

The emotional support piece may be harder to comprehend. We provide supportive counseling to all members of the family. When parents ask us, we advocate on their behalf with doctors and the hospital social workers regarding treatment and medical concerns. We educate parents about their child’s illness and its effects on their family. Since our social workers visit families in their homes, we are able to identify a multitude of needs of the ill child at home. We are the bridge between the hospital and the home.

We recently started a special support program for the brothers and sisters of ill children. Counselors meet with siblings in their homes, giving them a voice and the opportunity to express themselves. Our goal is to enable siblings to develop the coping skills needed to endure their changed family situation.

You might think of Friends of Karen as the glue that holds the family together.

Your kindness and generosity keeps us going. Thank you for sticking with us.

Judith Factor

Long Island Marathon *(from page 1)*

First Data Corporation, of Melville, New York, a global leader in electronic and payment solutions, has supported us for several years, raising funds and encouraging employees to volunteer at our special events. This year, First Data “team leaders” promoted the event and strengthened our team by inspiring more than 100 participants to join our 5K with a kick-off walk/run at their corporate facilities.



“Our participation with Friends of Karen in the Long Island Marathon was an amazing experience for all involved,” said Karen Whalen, Senior Vice President of Human Resources at First Data, and a member of our Long Island Advisory Board. “The event unified our employees around a higher order purpose, while significantly boosting team spirit and camaraderie across our Melville location. It is truly a privilege to be associated with Friends of Karen, and we can’t wait to begin planning for the 2011 Marathon!”

First Data’s involvement and philanthropy goes to the core of helping to improve the communities where employees live and work. Friends of Karen looks forward to more corporate partners joining us in 2011. Mark your calendars for April 30th for the 5K walk/run and May 1st for the 10K, half and full marathons. For more information contact Patricia Conway at 631.473.1768 patriciaconway@friendsofkaren.org

Mitchell's Story

Thirteen-year-old Mitchell was diagnosed with lymphoma in the summer of 2009. Then, only two weeks later, Mitchell's mother died suddenly of a heart attack. Because she had been closely involved with Mitchell's treatment plan and care plus managed all of the family's finances, bill paying and paperwork, Mitchell's dad didn't know where to turn first. Overwhelmed with grief and confusion, he had no idea how to even start putting life back together.

A hospital social worker suggested contacting Friends of Karen, and soon Jessica Dunn, one of our social workers, began bringing comfort and order into the family's life, including help in organizing the finances and providing emotional support. "There was nothing that I needed that she would not try to help with," says Mitchell's dad. "She gave me advice and taught me how to do things for myself and for Mitchell." Jessica visited them

"...what really sets Friends of Karen apart is the understanding, openness and willingness to assist with whatever we needed."

both in the hospital and at home, listening, answering questions, and guiding each of them through their feelings about a very stressful time. "I could talk to her about all that I was feeling when I couldn't talk to anyone else," Mitchell's dad recalls.

Like many teenagers, Mitchell spends his free time on the computer. He enjoys making videos with his friends and sharing them on his website. He has been off treatment since March, although he continues to get regular check-ups.

"The financial help is wonderful," Mitchell's dad says, "but what really sets Friends of Karen apart is the understanding, openness and willingness to assist with whatever we needed. I don't know how to thank Jessica and Friends of Karen enough – the help they give is unbelievable."



Making Illness More "Bearable"

One of the first things that Jane Hannon will tell you is "I'm not particularly special." But don't believe her. Not for one second. Jane is Friends of Karen's very special "bear lady." A few weeks ago, Jane and her husband John visited Friends of Karen's Purdys office carrying seven beautiful stuffed bears. Jane, a retired nurse, makes these bears for Friends of Karen children, "so that they have someone to talk to and help them feel better while they are sick," she says.

Jane began making bears for Friends of Karen in October 2006, and estimates that she has completed about 50 bears since then. Jane buys most of the outfits and other items she needs to create each bear, and her friends help out by donating "furry material." Although she uses patterns, her bears are amazingly different. "Each one has its own personality," says Jane. "I choose each outfit carefully. I try different clothes until it feels just right."

"I make my bears to give sick children a special friend they can confide in and love."



Jane "the bear lady" holding two of her favorite bears.

children's individual wish lists," she says. "It made it very personal and meaningful because the request came from the child." Jane also knew about another wonderful woman, Jody Cefola, who made very large bears for Friends of Karen. "I asked her whether I could make bears, too," Jane recalls. "I was just so happy that I was able to use my sewing ability to help children. I make my bears to give sick children a special friend they can confide in and love."

Indeed, Jane has some personal experience with illness. She was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2006. Now undergoing chemotherapy, she still finds the time to give back to others who are ill. "We are so fortunate that Jane has chosen Friends of Karen," says Judy Factor, Friends of Karen's Executive Director. "She pours her heart and soul into the bears and helps our children enormously." Judy adds, "Jane and John are extremely special. Don't let them tell you otherwise!"



Community Events

This is a sample of a few community events. Thank you!



■ **4th Annual Erin O'Connor Memorial Golf Tournament** – The Coldwell Banker/Erin O'Connor Memorial Golf Tournament set a new high, raising \$57,759 to benefit Friends of Karen. (pictured above) Mike and Eileen O'Connor



■ **Harris Family Foundation** – The 3rd Annual Harris Family Foundation fundraiser for Friends of Karen, hosted by Long Island Advisory Board member Elliot Harris and his wife Lisa at their home, raised more than \$12,000.



■ **Safe Harbor 500** – “I Can’t Drive 55” was the theme of the Safe Harbor 500 Slot Car Challenge at the home of Long Island Advisory Board member John Meyer (photo – back row, 3rd from right). John’s family and staff of Safe Harbor Title Agency served as pit crew and the event raised \$3,740 for Friends of Karen.

CHILDREN HELPING CHILDREN



Easter Tag Sale - Michael Graffitti, (r) a student at Somers Middle School, collected items from neighbors and friends and raised \$184 for Friends of Karen at a tag sale. Andrew Cannon (l), and Patrick Reilly (not pictured), also helped.



Local Heroes - Members of an after-school program, The Local Heroes of Pound Ridge Elementary School, chose Friends of Karen for their charity project and donated 26 backpacks full of new school supplies for Friends of Karen’s Back-to-School Program.



Birthday in a Bag - Temple Beth Am Youth Group in Yorktown, through several fundraisers, purchased all the fixings for 12 children’s birthday parties, including cake mix and frosting, baking pan, paper goods, candles, and even balloons and streamers. Pictured above brothers (l to r) Peter and Mark Franceschini.



The Children’s Hope Chest donated 172 backpacks, school supplies and gift cards for the Back-to-School Program. (l to r) John Lichtenauer and Austin Burns helped with the delivery.



The Comsewogue Girls Lacrosse team of Port Jefferson Station pose with the piggy banks they used to collect coins for our families.



Our kids really appreciate your generosity!

Friends of Karen's Adopt-A-Family Program

Every child feels the excitement and anticipation of the holiday. Whether it's Christmas, Hanukkah or Kwanzaa, youngsters – even seriously ill youngsters – know it's a special time of year. But for the parents of these children, it can be an even more anxious and stressful time, especially if there are other children in the family; often the family's limited funds must go for medicine, transportation to and from hospitals, co-pays at doctor visits, and other things critical to the care of the ill child, leaving little for holiday gifts and special treats.

Help us fulfill a child's holiday wish list and be part of creating treasured smiles and lasting memories for our families. Our program brings the holidays to sick children as well as their brothers and sisters.

No matter what your budget, you can make a difference in the lives of these children. You can "adopt" a child, shop for gifts, purchase a gift card, or simply make a donation and we will do the rest.

In 2009, you fulfilled the holiday gift wishes of 773 children. With your help, we can do it again this year! To participate, please contact Denise Tredwell at denisetredwell@friendsofkaren.org or 914-617-4052.

It feels so good to make wishes come true!



Thanksgiving: The Gift of Giving to Our Families

Most people look forward to Thanksgiving – the festive table, the delicious aromas, the pleasure of sharing a meal with loving family. For families caring for their seriously ill child, Thanksgiving is a challenge. Shopping for and preparing a meal is often impossible.

But you can change that very easily. Your support means that a family can have a Thanksgiving dinner to create a wonderful holiday meal. More importantly, they will have a chance to spend time together as a family – perhaps the most important gift of all.

To help, please contact Gwen Salmo at gwensalmo@friendsofkaren.org or 914-617-4051.

Tom Coughlin's Jay Fund Ice Cream Social



In June, New York Giants' head coach Tom Coughlin hosted his annual Ice Cream Social at Giants Stadium. The Tom Coughlin Jay Fund Foundation has been a significant Friends of Karen partner for several years by providing assistance to our families living in New York City and Northern New Jersey. Several of our children attended including Daniel and his mom Laverne.

Our Volunteers are the Best!



Volunteer Kathleen O'Connor standing with all the boxes of school supplies she packed that day. This year, our Back-to-School Program put smiles on the faces of 559 children in 226 families who received backpacks filled with new school supplies and gift cards for clothing to begin the school year.



Alison Urvater and her daughter, Ellen, packing school supplies for our children.



Long Island volunteers made sure the 8th Annual Long Island Golf Outing ran smoothly. (l to r) Diane Martin, Melanie Mouzakes (LI staff), Marie Cantone, Kim Haggerty, Gabrielle Pollard, Stacy Sanders, Debra Iorio



Honoring the lives of the following children who have died since our Spring 2010 Newsletter

- Jennifer Accardo
- Josue Alvarado
- Chika Anaso
- Michal Babayev
- Deyvis Baret
- Kevin Bell
- Adina Berkowitz
- Nicholas Cibelli
- Ali Del Carpio
- Yakov Diamant
- Ndeye Diop
- Carlos Espinoza
- Joel Espinoza
- Jonathan Garris
- Lucas Goldbaum
- Kayla Grigsby
- Irina Hon
- Josiah Johnson
- Terrance Jones
- Anjali Khatri
- Elexis Kinnie
- Ronn Lajara
- Jorje Landa
- Benjamin Loeb
- Alex Mele
- Kiara Ramirez
- Steven Reyes
- Omni Ryals
- Jason Sheehan
- Araminta Sindeband
- Danielle Sudmann
- Keisha Vernon
- Christopher Waterman
- Chun Lok Yeung

Meet Rhonda Ryan

Director of Family Support Programs



“It doesn’t matter whether you’re rich or poor, how smart you are, or what ethnic or cultural background you’re from, the critical illness of your child is a great equalizer,” says Rhonda Ryan, Director of Friends of Karen’s Family Support Programs. “No one is equipped to handle a life-threatening illness of their child.”

Rhonda has worked with thousands of families, providing emotional and financial support, advocacy, and referrals to needed services. She has counseled seriously ill children, their siblings and parents, answering their questions and helping to allay their fears. Over the 21 years that she has been with Friends of Karen, Rhonda has seen the organization grow from one that primarily provided financial support to a trusted lifeline offering comprehensive, hands-on assistance to families as they struggle with the illness of a child, which can continue for many years.

When Rhonda was working as a geriatric social worker, she was introduced to Friends of Karen by a social work colleague. It was love at first sight. “I think I can make a real difference for these children and their families,” she said to herself. And now, two decades later, she is still passionate about helping families facing devastating diagnoses, financial struggles, overwhelming scheduling problems, confusion about where to turn for help, and dealing with the emotional roller coaster that accompanies the serious illness of a family member.

“No one should try to walk this journey alone.”

Rhonda works with the whole family, including the ill child, to help them face their fears. She talks to siblings and parents whose worlds have been turned upside down by illness, letting them know that she is always available to answer their questions, to provide emotional support or a shoulder to cry on.

“We are able to offer hope, guidance and education to the families we work with, most of whom have never faced anything like this before. Based on our extensive experience, we are able to help normalize an abnormal situation. I learn from every child and every family we help. That’s what gives me the strength and knowledge to go on and help others,” says Rhonda.

“Whether a family needs a little help or a lot, Friends of Karen is here to help them. No one should try to walk this journey alone.”



Rhonda Ryan with Carly (center) and her family.

FRIENDS OF KAREN EVENTS

An Evening at Tribeca Rooftop



The 8th year for this downtown New York event at Tribeca Rooftop raised \$175,000. Gene Kurzrok and his son, Howard Kurzrok, were honored for their combined years of commitment to Friends of Karen families.

(l to r) Gene Kurzrok; First Lady of New York, Michelle Paige Paterson; Howard Kurzrok

Friends of Karen Receives Donations



Friends of Karen was one of the charities that benefited from the 2010 Long Island Elite Wonderland Masquerade Ball.

8th Annual Long Island Golf Outing



Held at the prestigious Meadow Brook Golf Course in Jericho, NY, this event was again sponsored by Capital One Bank, which continues to support Friends of Karen. This year Friends of Karen honored Susan Kiesel, Group Sales Executive at Capital One, for her commitment to our families.

(l to r) Susan Kiesel of Capital One; Nancy Mariano Regional Director, Friends of Karen

KeyBank Grant



(l to r) Kathleen Gregory, Sr. Relationship Manager of KeyBank and Pamela Dwyer, Relationship Manager of KeyBank presenting a KeyBank grant check to Judith Factor, Executive Director, Friends of Karen and Lynn Bahnken, Director, Finance and Administration, Friends of Karen.

Friends of Karen 17th Annual Children's Corporate Challenge Golf Classic



This year's Golf Classic on July 19th at the Westchester Country Club was tremendously successful, thanks in great part to our honorees, Roberta and Arnie Ursaner of CJS Securities, White Plains, NY. With 102 golfers in attendance, the event raised \$229,000 for Friends of Karen.

Roberta and Arnie Ursaner accepting an award from Friends of Karen in honor of their long-term support and dedication to the organization.

An Asian Occasion

On a beautiful evening in May, 220 guests enjoyed gourmet Asian fare, tasted fine sake and strolled through the Japanese gardens at the Hammond Museum in North Salem. The event exceeded our goal and raised \$240,000.

Robbie and Daphne Everett of Pound Ridge; Jody and J Durst of Cross River



(l to r) Pam and John Hervey of Katonah and Jennifer DeMarco of New York City

For more information on upcoming events please visit www.friendsofkaren.org



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HOW TO GIVE

Friends of Karen cannot help our children and families without your help.

Support comes in so many packages: food cards when money is scarce... a child's birthday present...words of encouragement or guidance from our social workers...brand new school supplies.

There are so many ways you can give – here are just a few:

- Donate in honor of a birthday, anniversary or other occasion
- Purchase supermarket gift cards
- Remember Friends of Karen in your estate planning
- Begin a matching gifts program at work
- Collect food items for Thanksgiving with your PTA, youth group or book club



www.friendsofkaren.org

Make a donation and find out how you can help.



We never forget a birthday!

Volunteer Cindy Calderone sorting toys for birthday gifts to be sent to our children and their siblings. Friends of Karen sends out 50-70 birthday gifts every month.

“Thank you for making it possible for us to be by Danny’s side 24-7...for the emotional and financial support, the beautiful clothes and toys, the stays at the Ronald McDonald House during his chemo treatments and most important thank you for caring.”

Danny’s family