

## Purpose in Practice

### How Friends of Karen Shaped My Commitment to Public Service

By Joshua Feld

My childhood changed with the start of a six-year treatment journey that required constant medical appointments, emotional resilience, and support far beyond what most young people should ever encounter. At only 12 years old, I was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin's T-Cell Skin Lymphoma, CD30+, a rare pediatric cancer, uncertain of what the future would hold.

Google search. What began as a chance discovery quickly became a deep, enduring relationship that played a crucial role in my family's ability to weather the hardest years of our lives. From therapy sessions to holiday assistance and consistent check-ins from our assigned social worker, Friends of Karen met real needs with grace that didn't ask for recognition.

Friends of Karen taught me that an ideal support system relies on stability, determination, and compassion. That's the mindset I carry with me every day. On a brighter, more personal note, I recently moved into my first apartment with my amazing girlfriend – something that once felt out of reach during the years I spent in treatment. This milestone reminds me of how far I've come and why I remain committed to building systems that help others get there, too. I hope that no one facing hardship has to go through it alone, and that, together with Friends of Karen, I can help other children like me receive the support they need to thrive.



Joshua (right) and his sister Sydney as children

Amidst that uncertainty, my family was fortunate to connect with Friends of Karen, a nonprofit that provided us with consistent practical care and emotional support. We didn't come across them through a referral or hospital network – in fact, we found them through a simple

Their sibling support services helped my younger sister, Sydney, begin to process something no child should have to make sense of. We still have the artwork from those sessions framed in my parents' home. It's more than a memento, it's a symbol of how comprehensive, family-centered care can nurture resilience.

That experience not only influenced my family but shaped who I have become. It helped define how I wanted to show up for others. Drawn to working directly with children who often face their own unique challenges, I entered the classroom as a special education teacher. Over time, I have realized I want to make an impact beyond the classroom, which has led me to pivot into public administration. As a Queens native and survivor, I'm especially proud to serve on the Friends of Karen New York City Advisory Board, where I can combine my professional expertise with my personal connection to the community.



Joshua in a recent photo

## Friends of Karen in Brief\*



**35%** of children served live in single-parent households

**54%** of families have an income of \$50,000 or less

**301** – average number of families served each month





friendsofkaren.org

#### Our Mission

To provide emotional, financial, and advocacy support for children with life-threatening illnesses and their families, in order to help keep them stable, functioning, and able to cope.

#### Founder

Sheila Petersen (1938-1990)

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Friends of Karen is a registered 501 (c) (3) charity established in 1978. All contributions are tax-deductible.

## Words from Friends of Karen Families



*"Friends of Karen isn't just a foundation, it's family! I didn't feel alone throughout this journey. You made a big difference in my family's life."*

*"We were lucky enough not to need financial assistance during my son's treatment, but I know this is a vital resource for many families. Instead, we were the recipients of mental/emotional support that made a significant positive impact for my son and us as parents."*

## Who We Serve and What We Do...

Friends of Karen provides emotional, financial and advocacy support for families caring for a child (birth through age 21) diagnosed with a life-threatening illness and living in the New York Tri-State region, including New York City, Long Island, the lower Hudson Valley, southern Connecticut and northern New Jersey.

Our professional staff of social workers, child life specialists and creative arts therapists ensures that each family member receives the support they need to stay stable, functioning and able to cope during a crisis that affects every member of the family. There is never a cost to families for any of the assistance they receive.

## Ways You Can Help

### Tax-Smart Giving

A strategic approach to philanthropy, donate through your:

- Donor Advised Fund
- Qualified Charitable Distribution (IRA)
- Gift of stocks

### More Ways to Make a Difference

- Join our Guardian of Hope monthly donor club
- Honor a loved one with a tribute/memorial gift
- Designate Friends of Karen for your company's matching gift program
- Participate in your workplace giving program
- Attend a Friends of Karen event
- Volunteer your time

## Annual Campaigns and Gift Programs

Bring together friends, family, and work colleagues to bring joy to children in need. Organize a toy drive, collect gifts-in-kind and gift cards, or host a fundraiser. Support these impactful campaigns:

- Holiday Adopt-A-Family
- Thanksgiving Grocery Gift Card Drive
- Birthday Program
- Feed-A-Family
- Back to School
- Giving Tuesday

**For more information, visit our website at [friendsofkaren.org](http://friendsofkaren.org) or scan the QR code here to donate now.**





# A Life Cycle of Support

## Helping Jeriah and his Family in Survivorship

*Jeriah is a 13-year-old from Rockland County, NY, who is in the survivorship stage of his illness journey after being treated for Hodgkin Lymphoma. He is currently one year post-bone marrow treatment and doing well. His mother Nadia shared how Friends of Karen helped their family during his treatment and continues to support them in the survivorship stage.*

"Friends of Karen has supported our entire family in every way possible during our son's medical journey—emotionally, financially, and practically. Jennifer, our creative arts therapist, provided our youngest son, nine-year-old Jaebin, with emotional support and helped him understand his brother's medical condition.

Melissa, our Friends of Karen social worker, worked diligently and creatively with our hospital social worker to help us stay up to date with our bills during my extended time away from work to care for Jeriah. We received help covering our housing costs, assistance with his insurance copays, support with groceries, and help paying for travel to and from his treatments. The boys even received birthday and holiday gifts, and backpacks filled with back-to-school supplies, which really cheered them up.

We have been supported emotionally, too. My husband James and I participate in the Friends of Karen Survivorship virtual support group. We get to speak with other parents who understand what it is like to have your child go through treatment and to face another new phase in our family's life.



(Left to right) Jaebin, Nadia, Jeriah and James

We are thankful that Friends of Karen is a life cycle of support. They have been with us through Jeriah's diagnosis, birthdays, and now survivorship. Friends of Karen provided peace of mind when the unimaginable occurred. They made sure all our needs were addressed. They filled in the gaps, which allowed us to focus on Jeriah and his immediate needs."

- Nadia, Jeriah's mom

# Supporting Michael and his Mom During Treatment



Maria and Michael

*Michael, a 10-year-old from New York City, was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia in November 2024 and is currently undergoing treatment. His mother, Maria, recently shared how Friends of Karen has positively impacted her family's quality of life.*

"I feel relieved and deeply thankful for everything Friends of Karen is doing for me and my son, Michael. When I first heard the diagnosis, I was very worried because I knew I wouldn't be able to work. I didn't want to leave my son with a babysitter—I wanted to care for him myself. Friends of Karen's support has allowed me to stay by his side, giving him all my attention and support.

Our Friends of Karen social worker, Natalia, made sure we had emotional and advocacy support to help us navigate this difficult illness without feeling alone. And our child life

specialist, Melissa, worked with Michael, using play and art to help him better understand his illness and treatment.

I am thankful that Friends of Karen helped us financially too. I got help with our everyday household expenses for essential items like cleaning products and toiletries. They made sure I had the means to purchase food during Michael's extended hospital stays and for unexpected travel to and from the hospital when he had emergencies.

Without Friends of Karen, I would have faced serious financial difficulties, and I don't think I would have found someone to talk to about how hard this journey has been. Friends of Karen has become my family during this difficult time. All my relatives live far away, so the visits, phone calls and check-ins I receive from Friends of Karen always remind me that I'm not alone."

- Maria, Michael's Mom



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*From a Friends of Karen Sibling Support session, a younger sister identified finding love everywhere, even in difficult times, after her brother completed treatment for leukemia.*

When you have finished reading this newsletter, please share it with a friend.

## Save The Dates!



### New York City "Defying Gravity" Gala

October 30, 2025  
Tribeca Rooftop, New York, NY



### Long Island AlwaysGold Gala

March 12, 2026  
Oheka Castle, Huntington, NY



### September is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month

Wear a Gold Ribbon or add a virtual Gold Ribbon to your social media accounts to show your support.

For more information, visit our website at [friendsofkaren.org](http://friendsofkaren.org)

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