



HOMETOWN HEROES

2024 Annual Report



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Mission Statement

Providing Hope and Healing to Children and families. In these years of immense challenges, we have all worked to build our resilience to become stronger and move forward with our purpose. Circumstances have meant that we sometimes feel as if we can't make a difference, but you can for children facing adversity in their lives.



Camp Hometown Heroes

Camp Hometown Heroes welcomes children, ages 7-17, who embody the statement “Freedom is not free.” They have made the ultimate sacrifice of losing a loved one who has served in the military. Serving children from all over the country, including Hawaii and Alaska, the campers are taken through a journey of healing through play, therapy and bonding.



Many come back year after year, and some have transitioned from camper to counselor after much care and trauma-based recreation over the years. Hometown Heroes is American Camping Association (ACA) certified and proud to have been selected as the 2023 winner of the Eleanor Eells Award for Program Excellence.

Camp Reunite



Camp Reunite serves children who have incarcerated parents in the Wisconsin Criminal System. Through trauma-based care, art therapy and meditation, the program works to curtail the cycle of incarceration, while also reuniting the children with their incarcerated parents during the camp stay. This program serves children ages 7-17. Through demographic studies of the children attending the camp, most are low-income (qualify for free and/or reduced lunch programming), live in foster care or with grandparents, have food insecurities, have inconsistent housing needs and lack basic needs that other kids their age often rely on. This program reunites children with their parents in prison while also addressing the issues that the children face daily living in poverty.



Letter from our Executive Director

Dear Friends of Hometown Heroes,

Our team at Hometown Heroes, Inc. remains committed to playing a role in addressing the widespread mental health crisis of our youth. The fierce commitment to this mission by our staff, volunteers, donors and community advocates, in partnership with many long-time returning families, allows us to find new ways to serve children and families each camp season. And...2024 was no exception.

We seek to foster a sense of connection and community. We humanize the shared challenges and experiences that bring our campers together, whether that is the loss of a loved one or incarceration of a parent. We believe every child facing these challenges deserves cheerleaders in their life and access to adequate resources. To that end, 2024 was a year to focus on meeting basic needs and addressing our children's physical and mental health outside of their time at camp.

This year at Camp Reunite, we launched a robust additional component of camp to provide clothing, winter coats, shoes, bedding, hygiene products, menstruation kits, backpacks, school supplies, just to name a few...to all camp participants at both our summer and winter camp programs. We intend to continue this program into perpetuity for these deserving children as we understand and recognize that our campers cannot address and heal from their trauma when their basic needs are not met. Further, we want to be a conduit to fostering greater educational support and homelife stability, and this new program is one way in which we are moving the needle in that direction.

At Camp Hometown Heroes, we continue to increase the scope of our mental wellness offerings. We have grown the depth of grief service offerings and memorial-related happenings at camp. We recognize and appreciate the importance of these very personal, meaningful and vulnerable experiences have on our campers, and have worked to ensure that our campers have many opportunities to delve into their grief – learn from it, grow and cascade into the next cycle of their lives. Further, we are so proud of how many of our former Camp Hometown Heroes campers have done just that; learned from the mental wellness practices experienced and have then manifested their grief into strength enough to have a desire to become counselors. In fact, most of our counselors in 2024 were former Camp Hometown Heroes campers.

The following report highlights the work we are proud to have accomplished in 2024. Camp Hometown Heroes, Camp Reunite, and our partner programs would not be possible without the generosity of our donors, the dedication of our volunteers and the belief of our countless partners who have embraced our mission to bring trauma informed, healing camp experiences to children for the past 12 years.

We are profoundly grateful. There are many exciting changes ahead in 2025. We hope you will follow along with us...



Kenzie Gonzalez

Executive Director | Hometown Heroes, Inc.

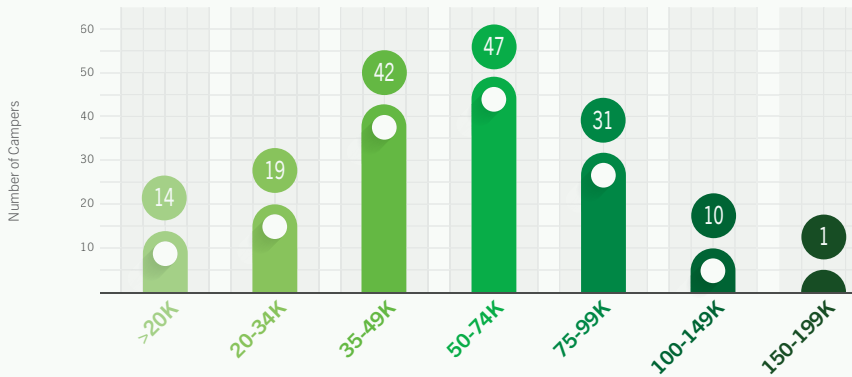
Demographics in Review – Camp Hometown Heroes

Camper Race



- 59% White
- 17.6% Hispanic
- 10.4% Black/AA
- 5% Native Indian/AN
- 4.7% Asian
- 1.8% Other
- 0.01% Hawaiian/PI

Family Income



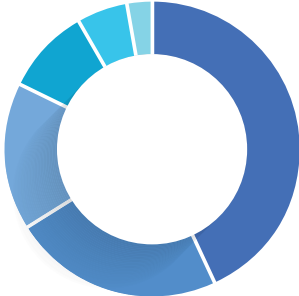
Loved One's Cause of Death



- 32.5% Suicide
- 29.3% Illness
- 23% Killed in Action
- 6.8% Vehicle Accident
- 2.6% Unknown
- 2.1% Overdose
- 0.02% Fire
- 0.01% Drowning
- 0.01% Accidental Asphyziation
- 0.01% Homicide

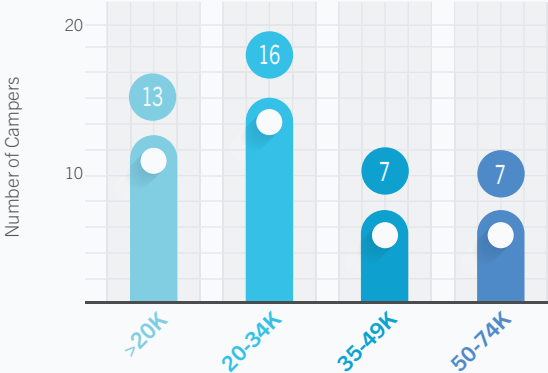
Demographics in Review – Camp Reunite

Camper Race



- 43.2% White
- 23% Black/AA
- 16.2% Hispanic
- 9.5% Native Indian/AN
- 5.4% Other
- 2.7% Asian

Family Income



Parent's Cause of Incarceration



- 28% Drug Related
- 24% Reckless Homicide
- 16% Revocation of Probation
- 16% OWI / DWI
- 12% Robbery
- 4% Alcohol Addition

Financials in Review

	Programming	Turning Rivers
Income	\$136,517	\$131,500
Expenses	\$65,933	\$518,501
	\$70,584	\$387,001

	Camp Reunite	General Programs
Income	\$105,216	\$156,594
Expenses	\$95,995	\$13,499
	\$9,221	\$143,095

	Camp Hometown Heroes
Income	\$694,573
Expenses	\$262,182
	\$432,391

Impact by Numbers



1,375
Kids Served



179
Votives Lit at the
Honor Ceremony



10,250 Meals Served
At Camp

150 Gifts Sent to
Campers from Their
Incarcerated Parents 

98 Hours of
Exploring WI
State Parks 



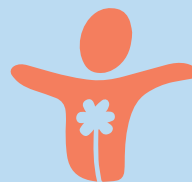
6,825
Volunteer Hours
Worked This Year

+2,000 Lbs

Of New Clothing, Hygiene And
School Supplies Given To Campers



225
Hours Of Mental
Wellness Sessions



48,258
Hours Of Joy

What is Mental Wellness?

Chloe Blish is our Mental Wellness Director and possesses expertise in children's health. With a trauma informed lens, she designs a curriculum that facilitates conversation, relationship building, coping skills, processing and release. The art is varied, tactile, evidence-based and age-appropriate. At camp, the children participate in daily mental wellness sessions in which they are working within their age groups, in a specified safe and consistent environment. Each session is guided by Chloe and consists of a one-hour session that gives instruction on the project, the why, and a reflective debrief amongst the group where campers can share their art, their thought process, feelings that come up and connect with one another on shared experiences.

Camp Hometown Heroes

- **Tree Planting Ceremony:**

We plant a tree in memory of fallen loved ones. Volunteers tie yellow ribbons on the trees to represent their family members. The tree planting is a symbol of our community in solidarity, honoring our growth through grief and based on the Survivor Tree story from Ground Zero.



Camp Hometown Heroes Continued

- **Butterfly Release:**

On the eve of the last day at camp, campers gather as we read a poem about rebirth (the caterpillar turning into a butterfly). The campers are each given a cardboard triangle to open and out flies a butterfly as they listen to uplifting music.

- **Celebratory Carnival:**

As a final goodbye to the week, we celebrate our new friends and new healing with a carnival. The kids get popcorn, cotton candy, jump in bounce houses and have a dunk tank.

- The carnival is majority led by veterans from our community who want to give back to the children. THANK YOU VETERANS!

- **Honor Ceremony:**

Campers are led by candlelight through a flag adorned path to the pool. We play soft music and speak about our strength as campers gather to honor their fallen family members in song and statements over candlelight.

- In this, the most pivotal night of camp, the children can say the name of their fallen service member with their official military title. No one is pressured to participate but many children say the name of mom or dad with pride.
- Children then put votives in the pool in containers that they've drawn on – either with the name of their loved ones, messages to their loved ones or drawings.



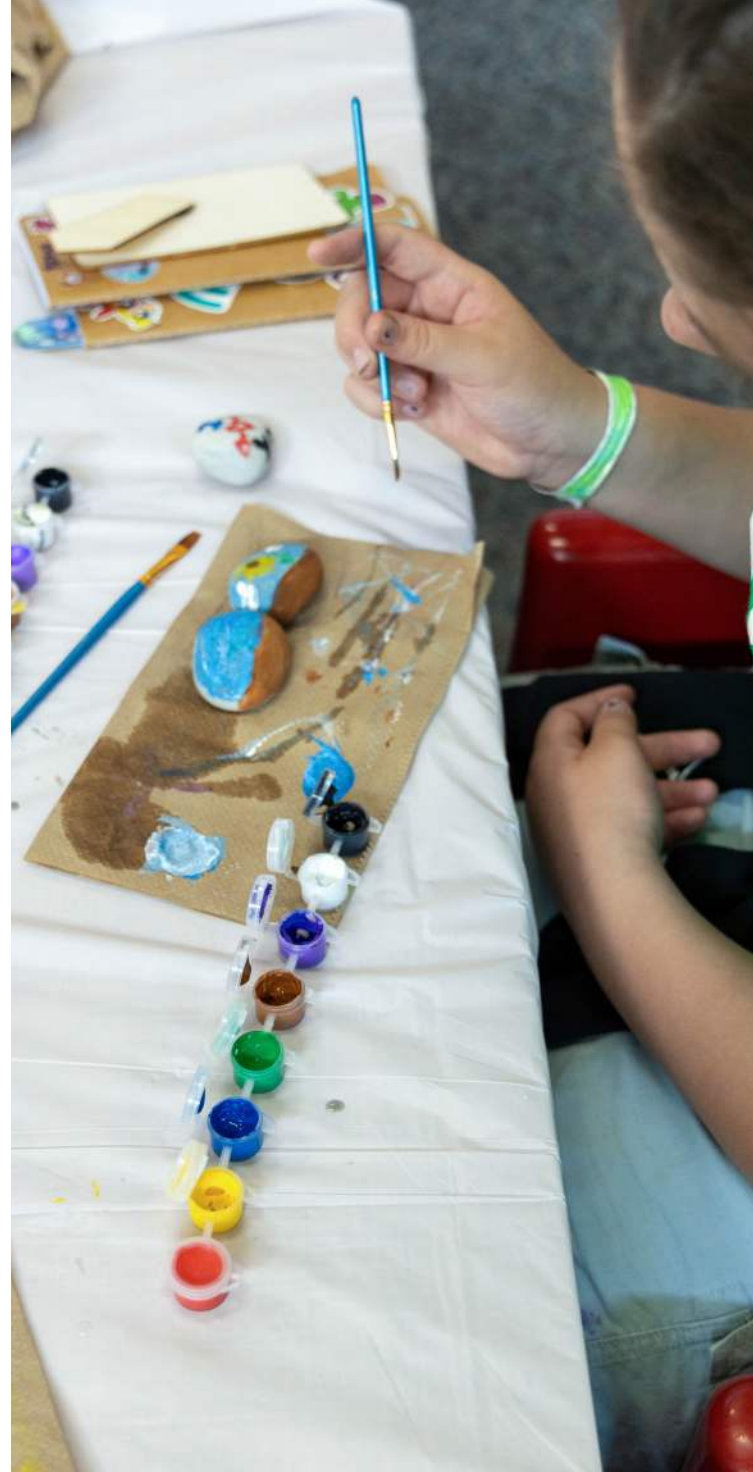
What is Mental Wellness?

Camp Reunite

- **Collaborative Activities at the Prisons:**

The most impactful activity during the week are the prison visits with mom or dad.

- The Camp Reunite committees at the women’s and men’s prisons create activities for the parents/kids to do while we visit. Our team brings supplies for the kids/parents to do art projects together as well.
- Kids and parents take photos together in a photo booth.
- Kids and parents put their thumb prints together on a “Family Tree” the first year that they are there together. This beautiful piece of art was crafted by the fathers at the men’s facility for use during our program.
- Families play basketball in the prison gym together and other recreational games outdoors.
- Parents read to their children – often the only time in their lives that this ritual takes place. Similarly, the families watch movies together – which creates opportunities for healthy connections and reinforces the positive relationships between parent and child. A rare gift for parent and child alike.



Camp Reunite Continued

- **Address Food Insecurity Concerns:**

Many of the children have insufficient food at home. That said, many will hoard food in fear of not being able to eat again, will not eat, as they aren't used to eating or will not eat what we are serving.

- Camp staff will get custom meals for the campers to make sure they are well-fed.
- We are so proud of the mountains that we've moved in this arena of addressing basic needs. All campers received a backpack full of school supplies at their camp visit in summer.
- All campers received new clothing and hygiene items during the summer, and Winter Campers received new clothing, new winter coats, new shoes, hygiene items and new bedding at their visit to us at Winter Camp.

- **Addressing Bed Wetting:**

Bed wetting is a form of trauma expression and many of our Reunite campers wet the bed, even at elder ages.

- We always have fresh sheets on hand, get them stuffed animals to feel safe and have middle of night rituals to make campers feel safe so they can return to sleep, such as having a cup of cocoa or reading with a sibling after a bed wetting accident.

- **Schedules and Predictability:**

Many Reunite campers' lives are unpredictable and change often due to instability of their home lives. We also are cognizant that these individuals are experiencing a lot of trauma just in visiting mom or dad at prison:

- Counselors post daily schedules in each of the cabins and give to individual campers so they can adjust to the daily activities and/or attain predictability.
- Visit days to the prison are very emotional and draining for the children. On those days, we keep schedules fluid and allow children to take naps or more downtime to accommodate for their emotional exhaustion.

- **Celebratory Carnival:**

As a final goodbye to the week, we celebrate our new friends and new healing with a carnival. The kids get popcorn, cotton candy, jump in bounce houses and have a dunk tank.

Our Exceptional Staff

Working with children affected by trauma requires extensive staff training and contingent planning to ensure that the kids are taken care of appropriately. All staff (full- and part-time) have an interest, background or previous training in education, social work and/or special needs. Most of our staff come back to camp year-after-year, and many are former campers from Camp Hometown Heroes, who have experienced the program as young people.

Staff are put through a two-week, intensive training in which they study behaviors by age. Counselors practice simulations for how to support the kids. Counselors go on overnight trips on the Ice Age Trail to practice Reflection Exercises in which they learn how to share their vulnerabilities.

Reflection exercises include things such as sharing internal and external scars, sharing highs and lows or sharing risks and challenges taken. Counselors practice said exercises that they will lead with the campers.

Staff who go above expectations may receive the Beyond the Call of Duty Award. Further, we also offer a Leaders in Training program in which we host offsite trips to practice resiliency, teen-specific grief and community support and team building



Family Feedback

Camp Hometown Heroes:

I had a family member commit suicide recently, leaving behind a young daughter. Charlotte has been such a comfort to her, and I believe camp has helped Charlotte know how to help in a lot of ways. Just want you all to know that the work you're doing matters, and it has such a far-reaching effect, not just for the campers. Camp Hometown Heroes is making the world a better, easier, kinder place.

This camp has brought a glimpse of happiness back into our lives. After my two oldest boys lost their dad suddenly to a combat-related injury, our lives have been forever changed. My oldest son was in a dark place, while the other one merely didn't understand why his daddy would never see him again. No counselor, psychiatrist, medication or group therapy was helping. After experiencing camp, they were the bright children they were before this tragedy... because they have hope from all the amazing people that have crossed their paths and share the same loss at Camp Hometown Heroes, because of this, they have hope. Hope is all we need to restore their hearts.

Camp Reunite:

Camp Reunite really gave him experiences, coping skills, and hope that I couldn't. And for that I will forever be grateful to all people who were involved.

Camp Reunite was a fantastic time for my child and me. I loved feeling like his mom again...

Before coming to this camp, I didn't know there were other kids in my same situation.

Turning Rivers Facility Updates

Thanks to the **Military Offices Association of America (MOAA)** for funding and providing:

- Alpine Tower Storage
- Providing used shipping containers for weather and rodent protection
- Supplies to build shelving/storage for all tower supplies
- Labor provided by MOAA
- Dining Hall lighting upgrades to all LED

Thanks to the **Hogue Foundation** for:

- Dining Hall air conditioners

Thanks to the **Home Depot Foundation** for:

- Windows replacement for some lower cabins
- Railing replacement on Dining hall deck
- Siding replacement on upper cabins
- Six new picnic tables
- Volunteering your time to help with labor

Thanks to **Honor the Fallen** for creating our newest fire pit.



Thank You to Our Volunteers!

Camp Hometown Heroes, Camp Reunite and the Turning Rivers facility are heavily reliant on the wonderful people who donate their time and talents to ensuring that our programming and site are perfect. From corporate-sponsored clean-up days, to corporate veteran groups coming to mentor campers, we are so fortunate to have volunteers choose our organization to donate their time.

- AUSA Association Of The United States Army, Milwaukee Chapter
- Direct Supply
- Field Fastner
- Keller Williams Culvers
- Kiwanis Kewaskum & West Bend
- Kohl's
- Kohler Company
- MOAA Military Officers Association of America, SE Wis. Chapter
- Northwestern Mutual
- Port Washington High School
- WV Ch 1 Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans, Milwaukee



Thank You to Our User Groups!

Turning Rivers also welcomes many user groups who wish to host camps of their own (some with use of our trained counselors and some without). Many user groups will also volunteer their time to clean the grounds and do other tasks to ensure that our camp is ready for our campers.

- Camp Hope America
- Camp Kindred Family Camp
- Camp Klotty Pine
- Homestead High School Volleyball
- The Sparta Project
- YMCA Camp Manitowish



Thank You to Our 2024 Donors!

5K for Heroes, Inc.
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Naperville Post #43 Amer Legion Ridgers

National Association Boxcar Hobos

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WE Energies Foundation

Wenthe-Davidson Engineering Co

West Bend Kiwanis Early Risers Foundation

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Whitnall Park Lutheran

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WIPFLi

Wisconsin vietnam Veterans Chapter 1.

Yontz Valor Foundation

YourCause

Zompa Charitable Fund

Ways to Give

Mail payments to: Hometown Heroes, Inc.,
1000 Badger Circle, Grafton, WI 53024
Attn: Development

Online: <https://givebutter.com/hometownheroes>

Corporate Match: Inquire with your employer about their corporate matching program. Donate to our organization and seek a match for your good deed!

Please note: We can help you set up recurring gifts and help you include Hometown Heroes into your estate plans.



Thank You to Our Board of Directors!

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CEO and President, Kapco, Kacmarcik Enterprise
and Co-Founder of Camp Hometown Heroes

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braatz@hometownheroes.org

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