



HOMETOWN HEROES

# 2023 Annual Report

# Table of Contents

Mission Statement .....	3
Camp Hometown Heroes .....	4
Camp Reunite .....	5
Letter from Our Executive Director .....	6
Demographics In Review - Camp Hometown Heroes .....	7
Demographics In Review - Camp Reunite .....	8
Financials In Review .....	9
Impact by Numbers .....	10
What is Mental Wellness - Camp Hometown Heroes .....	11
What is Mental Wellness - Camp Reunite .....	13
Parent Feedback .....	15
Turning Rivers Facility Updates .....	17
Thank You to Our Volunteers .....	18
Thank You to Our User Groups .....	19
Gala 2023 .....	20
Thank You to Our Gala 2023 Donors .....	22
Thank You to Our Donors .....	24
Ways to Give .....	27
Thank You to Our Board of Directors .....	28

# Mission Statement

Hometown Heroes, Inc. provides hope and healing to children and families by way of intensive recreational camp programming at Turning Rivers Camp Facility in Campbellsport, Wisconsin. By utilizing trauma-informed care practices, the Hometown Heroes staff is using a care-based approach to wipe clean the slate of trauma that many very deserving children have faced due to their unfortunate life experiences.



# 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,

The mental health crisis of our youth continues to loom large. Simply put, the world lacks enough accessible resources for all young people to maintain mental health and wellness. I believe, how effectively we respond to this deficit will shape the trajectory of the world in more ways than we yet realize. Hometown Heroes exists to play a part in addressing this disparity. Each year we strive to become better at meeting the particular needs of youth navigating grief, loss and familial separation. The following report highlights our progress in 2023. I am proud to partner alongside a dedicated team who works tirelessly year-round to plan and execute our life changing programs: Camp Hometown Heroes and Camp Reunite. Our staff recognizes what a blessing it is to be tasked with this work. We thank each and every donor and volunteer who has come together to make our vision— a generation of youth who thrive in the face of adversity— one step closer to reality.

In 2023, we were fortunate to have a passionate group of camp counselors who collaborated very effectively with the leadership team and our many returning volunteers. The result was a vibrant summer camp season for hundreds of youth. Many campers and their guardians reported 2023 to be the best year yet! In the year ahead, we plan to build on this momentum, and double down on our commitment to the youth we serve, by working with them on a recurring basis throughout the year. Our goal is to build on the life skills learned at camp and meet a wider set of our camp family's needs. I hope you will follow along with us and learn how we plan to do this starting 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 11 years. We are profoundly grateful.



**Kenzie Gonzalez**

Executive Director | Hometown Heroes, Inc.

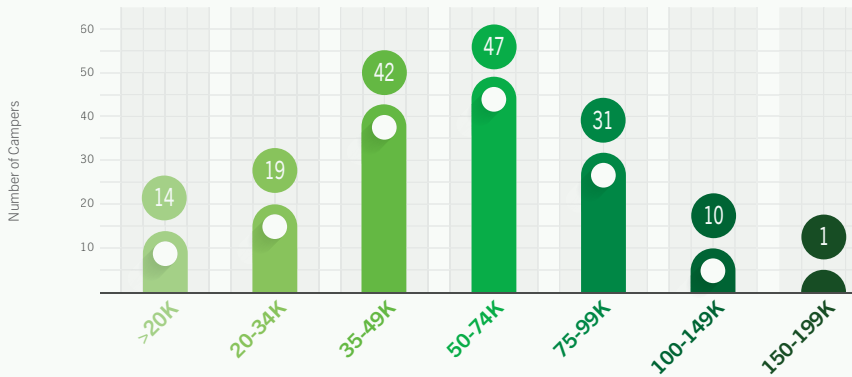
# Demographics in Review – Camp Hometown Heroes

## 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

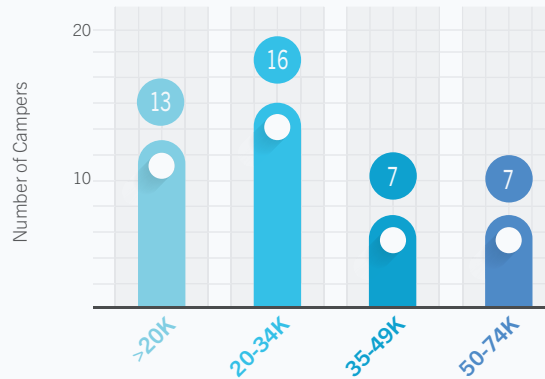
# Demographics in Review – Camp Reunite

## 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	\$521,584.12	\$490,625.30
Expenses	\$366,636.88	\$465,448.80
	<b>\$154,947.24</b>	<b>\$25,176.50</b>

	Camp Reunite	General Programs
Income	-\$12,900	\$59,361.82
Expenses	\$55,237.33	\$13,077.78
	<b>\$68,137.33</b>	<b>\$46,284.04</b>

	Camp Hometown Heroes
Income	\$458,697.30
Expenses	\$281,896.77
	<b>\$176,800.53</b>

## Impact by Numbers



**1,540**  
Kids Served



**200**  
Votives Lit at  
Honor Ceremony



**11,450** Meals Served  
At Camp

**150** Gifts Sent to  
Campers from Their  
Incarcerated Parents



**129** Acres of Camp  
Space Explored



**6,500**  
Volunteer Hours  
Worked This Year



**51,517**  
Hours Of Joy



**300**  
Hours Of Mental  
Wellness Sessions



**12 Trips**  
To The Airport

# What is Mental Wellness?

## Camp Hometown Heroes

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.

- **Highlighting an Honorable Camper:**

We highlight and give hoorays to a camper who demonstrates the mission of camp. He or she may have shared something vulnerable during the week, may have grown within the art exercises and/or may have helped another camper move through a challenging exercise with grace and compassion.

- **Tree Planting Ceremony:**

We plant a tree in memory of fallen loved ones. The campers are encouraged to tie yellow ribbons on the trees to represent their family members.

- **Butterfly Release:**

New this year! 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.



## Camp Hometown Heroes Continued

### 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?

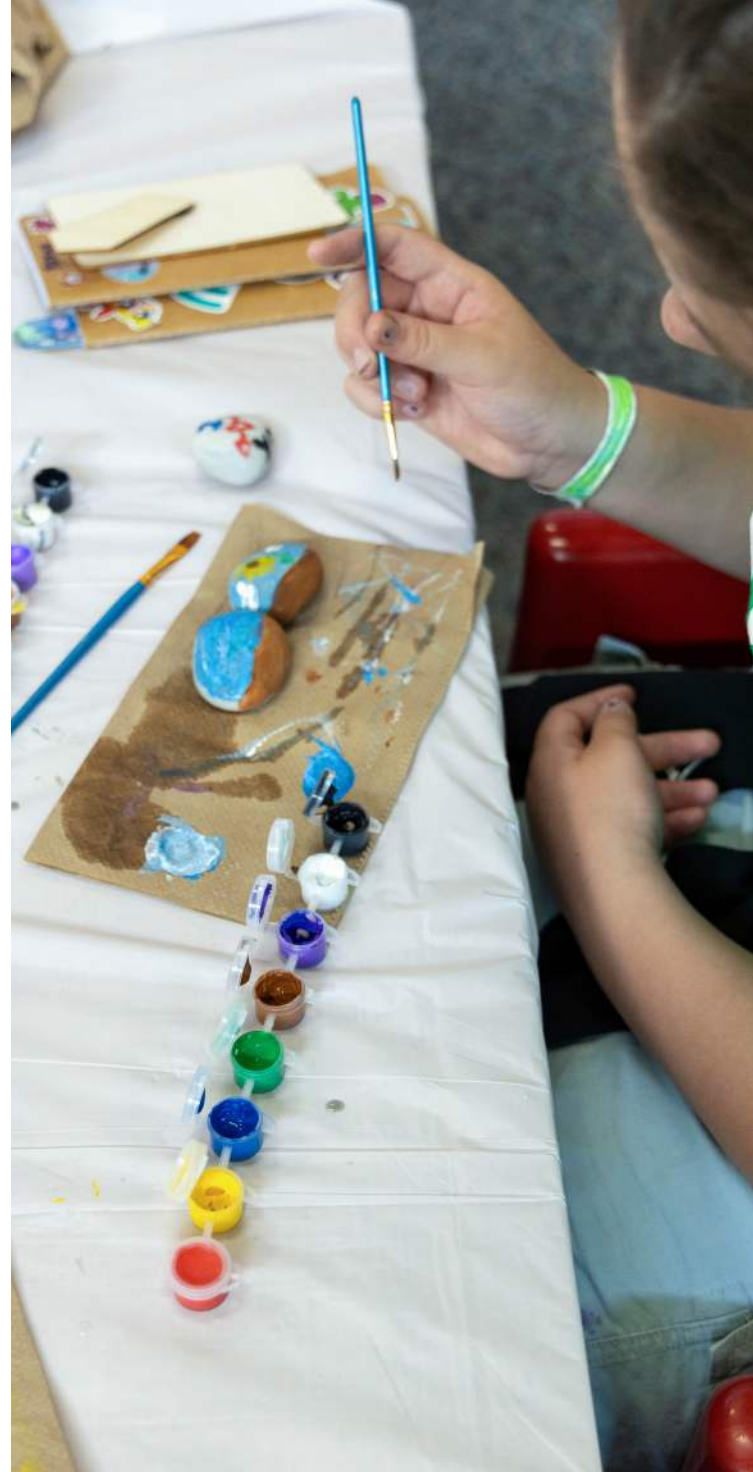
## Camp Reunite

We provide some really amazing and impactful rituals for the children to build lasting resiliency, strength and perseverance with the assistance of our tremendous staff for amazing young people of vast backgrounds from near and far.

- **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.
- 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.
- Families watch a movie together.



## Camp Reunite Continued

- **Swim Lessons:**

Most children who attend do not have access to swimming pools and/or do not know how to swim. As part of our recreational activities, we try and teach all the children how to swim on their own.

- **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 send food packages home with our campers who have food insecurities to ensure that they are not going hungry for the foreseeable future.

- **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 the 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 down time to accommodate 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.

# Camp Feedback

## Camp Hometown Heroes:

Camp Hometown Heroes was life changing and life saving for both of my girls. “A” - my one daughter, is now a junior in college (she was 12 at her first camp) and is studying to be a Child Trauma Specialist (Psych major). She works as a camp counselor at a local camp in the summers. She is already changing lives. “L” - my other daughter, never stops talking about Camp HH. She is 16 now and still marks down the days on the calendar to when she gets to see her “tribe”. She feels that this is the only place she is authentically herself. She is starting a college program this year for advanced students. Her goal is to become a child advocate in the court systems. These two girls grew up in Camp Hometown Heroes. I remember the first year. “L” was only 8 years old, and she talked with Steve Hartman [of 60 Minutes]. She told him she just wanted to be around other kids that understood what it was like to lose a parent serving in the military. Camp Hometown Heroes will always be part of our story and our journey. Thank you for your amazing contribution to our healing as we pay it forward.

Camp gave me the realization that I will no longer feel lonely in my sadness and that I am not the only one in this world who feels the way I do. Also, I no longer feel like grief is a bad thing.

Camp made me into the person I am today. I came to camp five years ago as an angry, distant and emotionally distraught 13-year-old. Camp gave me a place where I could finally be myself, a place where I could make lifelong friends and a place I could be a kid for once. This camp took that scared and angry girl and molded me into a loving, compassionate person that I am today. I never met a group that understands me more and who I have an unbreakable bond with.

Camp changed me forever. Before camp I painted myself up to be a victim and was convinced that I was, and would always be, a problem in my family or a glitch in the environment as a whole. I never saw my place in this world or had any desire to find it until I met my friends. I saw their tears, heard their laughter, and felt their pain. I also felt their love. They have my back now and I have theirs.

# Camp Feedback

## Camp Reunite:

“ Thank you for giving her a happy memory she won't forget. You guys rock! Great job well done. ”

“ I thank you and appreciate you. Thank you for being there for my grandchildren and giving them the time of their lives. ”

“ Thank you so much for the fun filled week my grandson enjoyed. You guys are very awesome people to do this for kids you don't even know! Thanks again. ”



# Turning Rivers Facility Updates

## Thanks to Great Lakes Roofing:

We have new and improved amphitheater seating. They removed old boards and installing new ones.

## Thanks to the Hogue Foundation for:

- Addressing pool deck safety concerns and repair work.
- Fixing trip hazards on gravel path to barn.
- Barn path lighting on path to driveway.
- Replacing the overhead door in maintenance shop.

## Thanks to the Girl Scouts for creating a Freedom Firepit and additional seating

- Creation of the 5K Seating area with swings.



# 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.

- Blue Star Mothers
- Direct Supply
- Field Fastner
- Great Lakes Roofing
- Kohler Company
- Kohl's
- Northwestern Mutual
- Reel Risk Management



# 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.



- Project Kindred (Camp Kindred)
- Gigi's Playhouse
- Great Lakes Hemophilia Foundation (Camp Klotty Pine)
- Homestead High School
- Sojourner Family Peace Center (Camp HOPE)
- Sparta Project
- Tourette's Association of America

# Hometown Heroes Gala 2023

The Hometown Heroes Gala (formerly the Grand Slam Charity Jam) was held on Saturday, October 14, 2023 and was a smashing success! Through the generosity of dozens of sponsors, table hosts, ticket buyers, auction donors and gracious volunteers, we generated funds for both Hometown Heroes and Camp Reunite.



The black-tie optional event at the newly redesigned Baird Center welcomed the Flannel Four during the cocktail hour with over 200 silent auction offerings, passed apps and an open bar. Guests were then served a multi-course meal as they were treated to a wonderful program hosted by ESPN anchor, Jen Lada. We ended the night with a lavish dessert bar and tunes by the Brew City Horns. All guests walk away with a chocolate dipped caramel apple engraved with our logo!

# Hometown Heroes Gala 2023

## Thanks to Our Generous Table Sponsors:

- Medix
- BMO
- Gruber Tool & Die
- Aurora Health Care
- Milwaukee Admirals
- WE Energies
- Advanced Coatings Inc
- Baird Center
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- Catalyst Construction
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- Gruber Law Offices
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- Kohl's
- Linde
- Milwaukee Bucks
- Olympic Steel
- Quad Graphics
- WIPFLI
- Standard Process
- Husco
- Educators Credit Union
- M3 Insurance
- Bank Five Nine

## Special Thanks to these Generous Organizations and Individuals for Making the Night Tremendous!

- Auction and Event Solutions
- Baird Center
- BBJ Linens
- Cold Sweat and the Brew City Horns
- CTI
- Bart Darfler
- Jan's Flowers
- Kacmarcik Enterprises' Team of Experts
- Kapco's Finance Team
- Kapco's Marketing Team
- Kilwin's – Bayshore
- Jen Lada
- VIP Photography

# Thank You to Our Gala 2023 Donors

Advanced Coatings

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Lesli Babbs

Baird Center

Bank Five Nine

Basic Metals

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Ashley Behnke

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Joseph Burmeister

Catalyst Construction

Diane Chapman

John Cimino

Charlie Connelly

Craig Coogle

Tiffany Coris

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West Bend Burgers Inc. Culver's  
West Bend Kiwanis Early Risers Foundation  
White, JM  
Whitnall Park Lutheran  
Whitnall Park Lutheran Church  
Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Chapter 1  
Yontz Valor Foundation



# Ways to Give

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

**Online:** [www.donatenow.networkforgood.org/hometownheroes](http://www.donatenow.networkforgood.org/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!

## **Jim Kacmarcik**

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

## **Andrew Limouris**

CEO and President, Medix

## **Karen Longoria**

Educator

## **Tom Messplay**

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## **Tom Multerer**

Founder and Managing Member, Junction Box, LLC

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Advocate Aurora Healthcare

## **Sue Turowski**

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