

Giving the gift of

Hope Foundation offers grants to support individuals with disabilities

by Hillary Dickerson

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EAST DUBUQUE—Eight years ago, when Cohen Meyer was born with severe cerebral palsy, the news his parents, Shane and Jody, received from doctors wasn't very encouraging.

Doctors told the Meyers that Cohen wouldn't survive without a feeding tube and needed lots of help to breathe. They said he wouldn't walk, talk,

swallow, blink, roll over.

At seven days, though, Cohen opened his eyes and wiggled his toes. "He let us know he was in there and he was our very special gift," Jody wrote in 2012.

Shane and Jody have been fighting for their son ever since.

Cohen spent three months in the hospital after his birth as Shane and Jody took turns being at the hospital and bringing his brothers—Carson, now 11; Chase, almost 13; and Cohen's identical twin, Crue—to visit.

Cohen spent the next couple years in and out of the hospital. A trach was placed when he was

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Hope Foundation board members include: Bill Wubben, president; Alan Bird, vice president; Carole Sullivan, secretary; Marge Cooke, treasurer; Laurie Mattas, chair of gift and grant committee; Santy Mendez, Don Shine, Don Fouts, Laurie Wurster, Fred Bonnet, Dr. Debbie Chihak, Evelyn Fryer, Pat Jordan and Chris Curran.

2, and his chronic lung disease has been manageable. Cohen is nonverbal but communicates by blinking for yes and turning his head for no. He walks with assistance and will be a third grader in the fall at East Dubuque Elementary School. With in-home and in-school nursing assistance, Cohen does occupational, speech, physical, vision and hearing therapy.

Every day when Shane and Jody look at their son, they see a miracle, and their fight continues.

But, of course, in caring for their son, there are expenses—many of them.

And that's where the Hope Foundation comes into play.

A few years ago, searching for financial assistance online, Jody, a hairdresser, discovered the Hope Foundation, a Jo Daviess County-based foundation that provides financial assistance to individuals with disabilities and the agencies that



Shane and Jody Meyer with their 8-year-old son, Cohen, who has severe Cerebral Palsy, are grateful for the grant support their family has received from the Hope Foundation. *Hillary Dickerson photo*

serve them.

At that time, Jody was actually seeking help to purchase a handicap accessible van, and although that particular project was more than the Hope Foundation could help fund, the board wanted to make a difference any way they could.

Hope Foundation officials instead suggested the foundation could help the Meyers family with every day expenses.

Through their family care grants—which offer financial support to individuals and families caring for a family member with a disability—the foundation, over the past several years, has provided an annual \$1,000 grant to the Meyers family—it's recently increased to \$1,500—to help cover expenses such as co-pays, shoes for special braces, gas money to doctor's appointments and much more.

The support from the foundation has been an incredible blessing, said Jody.

The annual grant helps cover some of the costs that otherwise would have gone on a credit card, the costs that add up and are over and above what she and Shane, a machinist in Peosta, are able to cover as they raise their four sons, one with very special needs.

"Every little bit helps," Jody said, grateful for the kindness and support shown through the years by Hope Foundation board members Evelyn Fryer, Vickie Gratton and Laurie Mattas and executive director Don Gereau. "They're all fabulous."

After having such a great experience with the foundation, Jody has passed the word and told others about the financial assistance offered. She wants others to know there is help available and the Hope Foundation is a wonderful option when the need arises.

Offers hope

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GALENA—The mission of the Hope Foundation is simple: to provide financial assistance to individuals with disabilities and the agencies that serve them in Jo Daviess County.

"The need continues to grow," said Don Gereau, Hope Foundation executive director.

Incorporated in 2002—called JDWI Foundation at that time—and started as a way to reach more families in the county, the foundation awards grants based on one or more functional limitations in self-care, receptive and expressive language, learning, mobility and capacity for independent living, cognitive functioning and emotional adjustment. Grants are awarded to both individuals and agencies. The foundation has worked with agencies such as Rainbow Ridge, Riverview Center, Northwest Academy, Tyler's Justice Center, Family TIES, United Churches of Galena, The Workshop, Jo Daviess County Special Olympics and others.

Gereau explained that over time the foundation has found more and more families with children or spouses in need of support. That led to the establishment of the foundation's family support grant that assists families caring for a family member with a disability.

"It promotes family unity and provides limited temporary support by enabling people with disabilities and their families to meet current short term financial needs associated with health, housing, transportation, education and employment," according to the foundation.

Each family or individual can receive up to \$1,500 each year.

According to Gereau, the foundation receives funding from three sources: board members who donate about half the year's budget, an annual golf outing that will take place this year on Monday, Sept. 21 at Eagle Ridge and general donations from others. The foundation brings in about \$30,000 each year and in the last three years has distributed about \$52,000. "It's substantial," said Gereau, noting the endowment is at \$230,000 and since its inception has distributed close to \$100,000 in grants.

On Monday, July 20, the foundation will host a luncheon for representatives from agencies who will be able to help the foundation get the word out about grant availability to people in need.

For more information on the foundation, visit HopeFoundationJDC.org or call 815-238-2636.