

# Lifeline



**Kids NEED Camp**

*And You Make It Happen*

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... and so much more!



## A Personal Word from Randy Odom, President and CEO



Summer '24 at Kids Across America (KAA) was incredible! KAA is rebounding strongly, after the challenging summers of COVID. We had 3,888 campers and 662 Kaleos (adult mentors who bring kids to camp) attend KAA this summer.

*Kids need camp.*

And we are grateful for your willingness to ensure deserving kids get to attend a transformational week at KAA. For the week, they feel loved, encouraged, healed, unburdened, and most importantly, closer to Jesus. And when they leave us ... they take all of this "to go" — positively influencing their families and home communities.

God's hand was at work through some incredible moments. Foster care children and Angel Tree campers (kids of incarcerated parents) experienced the best week of their lives, and urban football and basketball teams spent a week team building and learning about Jesus at KAA.

Two amazing partnerships kicked off in '24. WinShape Camps, part of the WinShape Foundation founded by the late Truett Cathy, joined forces with us to bring Kids Across America to the city. Together, we hosted pop-up events for kids in Memphis and Little Rock. And our partnership with Athletes in Action, a sports ministry of Cru, will help us recruit and train the best summer staff in the history of camping — now and for years to come.

KAA's servant leadership development program, Higher Ground, nurtured an amazing group of new Christian leaders from cities all over America. And 440 college-aged young people served as staff, including many former campers — something we are especially proud to report.

*Join us as we prepare for next summer to minister to even more deserving young people and their adult mentors.*



Camp by the numbers: 3,888 campers

# “This is His Story”

Camp was a game-changer for Khyser in the summer of '22. Things at home were rough. He and his three siblings, mother and grandmother were all really struggling financially. Both his mom and grandma were dealing with serious illnesses. His mom had even lost her eyesight.

When the opportunity to go to camp arose, Khyser jumped at it. KAA was a welcomed break for him, but it was more than the activities, food, and fun that he enjoyed. “The last time I came, it changed my life,” Khyser explained. “I learned so much.”

When he returned to his home city of Detroit, circumstances only worsened. Khyser’s mother became more ill and passed away. His grandmother, fighting to keep it together, lost the house they were living in.

They ended up homeless. Then, she passed away. The situation was as dire as it could get. *But Khyser held onto what he had learned at camp.*

“Usually guys my age will turn to drugs,” he shared, “but I knew God was with me the entire time. I know He saved me. Everything happens for a reason, and this is His story.”

He and his siblings are now living with their dad. And this past summer, Khyser came to camp again. He



wanted the chance to learn more and grow closer to God, so he soaked up everything he possibly could. His counselors taught him many important things — how to ask God for words, when words fail; how to rest your burdens on Him; how to forgive; how to spend time with God by staying in His word and listening to His voice ... and more.

Khyser’s week at KAA was filled to the brim with

God’s Word and instruction, love and encouragement from his counselors and cabinmates, and healing moments. “One week at this camp will change your life,” he shared. “He showed me to keep coming to Him. Any pain you are feeling can be cured by praying to Him, praising Him and talking to Him.”

Praise God for showing up in Khyser’s life at the right moment, and *thank you* for making it possible for Khyser to receive scholarships to come to KAA!



# KAA Elite Expands

## First Ladies' Basketball Team Welcomed

They dribbled, shot, rebounded, tubed, tackled the ropes course, and experienced *awesome* team-building moments during the first KAA Elite camp for the ladies' basketball team from Palestine, Texas.

KAA Elite offers a structured, empowering and encouraging time for teams and coaches focused on team- and character-building, skill development, and sports competition. Access to first-rate weight lifting equipment, plus tubing, archery, a high ropes adventure course, and more make the week at camp a BLAST.

→“Our kids needed it,” Coach Daniels Nichols shared. “I knew they would get the Gospel here and tons of positive influence from the counselors.” It was not his first time to KAA. He spent five summers during college serving as a KAA counselor and Kaleo shepherd.

**The girls experienced more than team building ... 9 out of the 10 girls made first-time commitments or recommitted their lives to Jesus!**

Coach/Counselor Reese Dare was assigned to the first Elite girls' basketball team. During the week, she witnessed tremendous growth amongst the girls. She told them, “You will always need someone there with you. You can't hold your burdens and traumas alone. You need the Lord.”

“Cross Talk was a powerful experience for me,” team member KK shared. “I had a lot of ‘junk’ inside that I had not dealt with. I was able to open up, and I reconnected with Jesus. I'm going to take what I learned here back home.”

Coach Nichols plans to continue bringing his team to Elite and hopes that this first group of athletes will serve as leaders and bring the energy and encouragement back to the rest of the team.

Storri, another team member shared, “This camp was on my path to get closer to Jesus!”

If you know of a girls' basketball or boys' football team that needs the Elite camp experience, let us know by reaching out to Randy Odom, [randy@kaakamps.org](mailto:randy@kaakamps.org), or Ray Arechiga, [ray@kaakamps.org](mailto:ray@kaakamps.org).



# Building Christian Leaders



**K**ids Across America (KAA) joined Elevate Branson for its annual Summer Bash Block Party for the Branson community on June 12. Elevate Branson is a not-for-profit in Branson, Mo., that addresses the root causes of poverty through access to resources, relationships, and a network of support that provides hope, dignity, and meaningful work. More than 200 attendees enjoyed live music, games, inflatables, a picnic dinner, and community fellowship.

Students from Higher Ground (HG), KAA's two-year leadership program, served dinner, set up and supervised the inflatables, games, and a climbing wall for attendees to enjoy. This outreach served as the capstone for the students after a week of servant leadership training.

"The perception is that you have to leave the country to do mission work," explained Jenson Newton, HG Director. "Through HG, we want to show campers the various

mission opportunities right here in the US.

Prior to event set-up, 14 HG students toured Elevate Branson and learned about its heart for all people to reach their full potential, as well as the various services it offers residents.

HG student Kayden Davis, a high school student from Austin appreciated the chance to learn and grow through this experience. She connected with a female attendee and was able to listen to her story, encourage, and pray for her.

"My experience at HG and Elevate Branson literally makes me want to do more," Kayden said.

With some volunteering and ministry outreach experience under her belt, Kayden is returning to Austin ready to serve others in her own community.

# KAA Launches HG Work!

**W**hat goes into running a summer of camp at KAA? Our second-year Higher Ground (HG) students learned all about it through our brand-new HG Work program.

The 20-hour apprentice program began by providing the students with a closer look at the different departments at KAA — from security to warehouse. This allowed them to see the bigger picture and understand more about how camp functions. KAA summer staff coordinator, Alissa Moore, provided training on KAA's application and interviewing process, as well as instruction on how to prepare for and effectively communicate in any interview.

The students were then paired with full-time KAA employees who have more than 20 years of expertise in their fields. Students had the opportunity to shadow the employees in the health centers, the kitchen that prepares meals for Kaleos, KAA 3 office, KAA 1 maintenance, auto shop, development, and media department.

Three of the students shadowed Mischia Jackson, KAA health services director, and her summer medical staff at all three health centers on site. They received hands-on experience by assisting with admitting patients and preliminary evaluation.

"Through this experience, I learned that I need to humble myself in order to serve others," said Jayla, one of the three students to shadow Mischia and her staff. "I also learned the importance of really listening."

"HG Work allows students to learn some skills and how to do that, while glorifying the Lord," Mischia shared. "It is exciting to know that kids coming to KAA get to hear the Gospel, but [we] also pass on practical advice and hands-on experience in a field. We want to make leaders in the communities we reach."

This robust experience wasn't all work and no play. The week ended with the students enjoying some of the camp activities, such as boating and the high adventure ropes course.





# Hope for Opelousas

Deeply embedded in the heart of swamp country — where Zydeco music and Cajun spices are celebrated — sits Opelousas, a beautiful, quaint, town more than 100 miles north of New Orleans. With a population of less than 16,000 people, Opelousas is not large. However, it suffers from big-city problems — gun violence, drug misuse and overdoses, and a high density of single-parent households. The poverty rate for Opelousas is 39% — more than double the state’s rate of 18.7% — and the poverty rate for Opelousas children is 50%.

Loren Carriere grew up there. He fell into drugs and alcohol — a habit that followed him to the University of Louisiana in Lafayette — and eventually landed him behind bars.

While in jail, his uncle wrote him a letter about a loving Savior that forgives and can make beauty from ashes. Loren prayed the

sinner’s prayer in his jail cell. And true to his uncle’s word, God took Loren’s story of disobedience and made something beautiful.

Loren redeemed his college career, graduated, and started a street ministry in downtown Lafayette. When God put his hometown on his heart, he moved back to Opelousas and launched Hope for Opelousas (HFO) 16 years ago, with the help of a friend and Hope Presbyterian church.

HFO offers educational support, neighborhood outreach, and intentional relationships grounded in truth and love. It reaches youth through afterschool tutoring, long-term relationship building with families, Bible studies, outdoor adventure/learning excursions and travel, and a leadership development program, called Agents of Change.

*They also bring kids to KAA ... about 800*

of them in the last 14 years! HFO brought Madison as a camper. She went through HFO’s programming and now serves as an HFO Agent of Change, HFO’s leadership development program. Madison served as a KAA counselor this summer — a beautiful, full-circle experience.

The coolest part — Madison had a camper in her cabin who came with HFO, which was special not only because she was from Opelousas, but because she had tutored this young lady for the past two years.

“It was a full-circle moment,” Madison explained. “I loved being able to see how much of a difference I was making. Many

times, I was able to connect with the kids over things I had experienced as a camper.”

She cherished every minute and opportunity to serve and grow at camp. “The people are so encouraging,” Madison said. “They pour so much into the staff, and it really helps, because there are tough weeks. There is so much light at KAA!”

KAA is just another building block in Madison’s journey. She begins school at Northwestern State University this fall, where she plans to study law and family studies. *It all began with Loren, his loving Savior, and a transformed life.*



**★ Camp by the numbers:  
27% of summer staff are former campers**



## Angel Tree Campers Welcomed

**T**hey came. They saw. *And they had so much fun!*

KAA welcomed 45 Angel Tree campers from Oklahoma. These campers are children of incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parents. Dee Miller, a KAA board member and long-time Kaleo, organized the Angel Tree campers from Muskogee and Oklahoma City.

“The Angel Tree campers did not believe that they could ever come to anything like KAA,” Dee said. She explained that it is important for an Angel Tree camper to come to camp for many reasons — but especially to experience good role models, get a break from their home environment ... and just to *be a kid*.

Kylee, age 15, came with the group. She could not hold back her smile as she shared about her week at KAA! Kylee explained that she is hesitant to go to new places, but that she was proud of herself for “getting out of

her comfort zone.”

She admitted to thinking camp would be “kind of boring,” since it was a Christian camp.

But, after experiencing a week at camp, she said, “It was beyond my expectations! KAA has helped me get closer to God. I felt like a weight was lifted off my shoulders. I made new friends. I felt joyful. I got the hype — and now, I’ll take all of this back home and share with others about the love of God and how to celebrate Him!”

“KAA’s week of hosting Angel Tree campers was a huge success,” Randy Odom, KAA president and CEO, shared. “We were honored to have the opportunity to pour into and encourage these young people for the entire week. KAA and Angel Tree are just scratching the surface. We hope to welcome hundreds of Angel Tree campers next year.”

## Slippin’ and Slidin’ for Jesus

**“T**he slip-n-slide was epic — definitely the best activity. I went like six or seven times at least!” —Adrienne

*“It was slippery. It was fast. It was FUN!”* —Anecia

Golden, Mo., is home to KAA camps in the Ozark Mountain Region, which provides beautiful and hilly landscapes ... *and an AWESOME downhill spot for an EPIC camp slip-n-slide!*

Campers attending KAA 3, the camp for kids ages 14-18, were welcomed with a brand-new activity this summer — a 300-foot slip-n-slide. The KAA Construction Department built the activity over the winter and spring, after a generous family donated the funds for the materials and construction.

Both veteran and first-time campers were excited to try out the camp’s new water adventure. It was a HUGE HIT! “The success of the slip-n-slide lies in the smiles and laughter of the kids experiencing it,” says Randy Odom, KAA president and CEO.



# Athletes in Action SHINE at KAA

Introducing ... a perfect partner for KAA — Athletes in Action (AIA).

For more than 50 years, Athletes in Action — a sports ministry of Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ) — has been walking with athletes to help them grow in all dimensions of life. With a presence on 200 college

campuses, AIA connects athletes and coaches to the global community — including KAA! — where they can develop holistically and discover purpose, both during and after their athletic career.

It takes 400-500 high-quality, summer staff to put on camp. This summer, KAA hired 440 college and university students to serve as counselors, coaches, kitchen staff, boat drivers, maintenance, and much more to make camp run safely and smoothly.

During the “off” months, KAA staff “hit the trail” to recruit high-quality, hardworking young men and women who love Jesus to work the summer at camp. For the past two years, KAA has partnered with AIA to connect with college athletes who have a heart for Jesus and want to serve Him in the summer.

Two of those athletes this summer were Jillian

Tunncliff, a University of Michigan freshman majoring in movement science and on the row team, and Janie Sandel, a University of Georgia sophomore intending to major in management and on the track and field team. They heard about the opportunity to work at KAA through AIA. They worked together as cabin co-counselors this summer.

Jillian was excited to see her campers grow in the Lord! “We taught our campers how to be accountable, how to look to the Lord in everything — in all your struggles, and how to be a better Christian leader,” she shared. Jillian grew, too! “I didn’t know what to expect coming to work here as summer staff.

The connections you build — all while you are learning, too!”

For Janie, the best part was getting to see the campers experience all the fun activities and nice sports amenities. She especially enjoyed showing campers the power of prayer. “We prayed through everything at KAA,” she shared. “We also did a lot of teachable moments — showing the kids how to incorporate Christ into every sport or activity.

*Thanks be to God for bringing Christ-like, young men and women role models to pour into our campers!*



# Pizza Chain “Cooks Up” Camp Scholarships

\$20,000 in camper scholarships ... *thanks to pepperoni, cheese, and all the fixins!*

Hideaway Pizza cooked up a savory deal to ensure kids get to experience camp. For a full week in April, the pizza chain donated to KAA \$2 from the sale of every large specialty pizza sold at its locations.

By donating a portion of the proceeds from specialty pizza sales, Hideaway Pizza helped Kids Across America continue its important work of inspiring and empowering young people. And we are so grateful!

## Help KAA Keep Rolling! Donate a Vehicle

Here's a different way to impact KAA ...

KAA uses vehicles to move campers, perform maintenance functions, run errands, and serve in urban areas. Trucks, SUVs, vans — pretty much anything you can drive on land (or water) ... KAA can probably use it!

Instead of selling your vehicle, consider donating it directly to KAA! Our talented mechanics are great at extending the life of vehicles for ministry. If you would be interested in donating a vehicle, ATV, UTV or boat, we would love to talk with you.



Hideaway Pizza got its start in Stillwater, OK, in 1957, and has expanded to 17 eateries in three states. To learn more about Hideaway Pizza or to find a location, visit [www.hideawaypizza.com](http://www.hideawaypizza.com).

If you own a business and would like to partner with KAA on a similar promotion to ensure finances never stand between deserving kids attending camp, please reach out to Dave Feldner, [dfeldner@kaakamps.org](mailto:dfeldner@kaakamps.org).



Contact Dave Janke at 417-263-1800 or [dave@kaakamps.org](mailto:dave@kaakamps.org). We will make the donation simple, so you can impact even more lives!



## Tomorrow Never Dies Your Legacy Shouldn't Either!

You don't need to find the Fountain of Youth to achieve immortality — you simply need to *plan ahead!*

By creating, or updating, a will or estate plan, you can make sure the legacy and impact of your life lasts forever — providing for your loved ones, giving voice to your Christian values, impacting youth from under-resourced communities through KAA, and adding to the treasures you've stored up in heaven in perpetuity.

You may also avoid unnecessary taxes, probate fees, and other burdens for your surviving loved ones!

Plus, the process is much easier and faster than most people realize. Here's what you

need to know:

When you include Kids Across America in your will, you can either ...

- Establish a bequest of a certain amount — or
- Give a percentage of your after-tax estate
- Simply provide your attorney with instructions, our formal name (Kids Across America) and tax ID #: 83 - 1966879

*For more information on these or other strategic giving options, contact Marsha Miller at 417-266-3129.*





## Marth Meets Sophanica ... a Life-Changing Encounter

**“G**od is an interesting orchestrator!”  
—Marth, a mother of two and a KAA Kaleo

If anyone can say this and mean it, it's Marth! Her story of impact on the life of a special camper is one that must be shared!

Marth heard about Kids Across America by chance while watching a church service online. She decided to take her two children to KAA and serve as their Kaleos. When she arrived at camp, she asked God, “What am I doing here?” It didn't take long for God to answer her question.

Foster parents of West Palm Beach, Samuel and Neva, also came to camp with their six foster daughters. One of them is Sophanica.

She started at camp a little nervous and shy, and it took a bit for her to catch onto the *hype* of camp. But soon, she was into it big time! She loved boating, and the Olympic games — sprints, relays, and other competitions. Her team even won in swimming, and she won first place in the sprint competition.

God had a plan to reach Sophanica, but it was not through a counselor or anyone who ended up in her cabin — it was through Marth.

Sophanica was born and spent her early childhood in Haiti before her family emigrated to the US. “I grew up around a lot of people who were not Christian,” she explained. “My family was not Christian. At

first, when I came to Florida, I had a hard time believing in God. My biological dad would not let me attend church.”

Since living with Sam and Neva, she has attended church regularly and learned about Jesus — but God made a tremendous effort to reach her at KAA!

Neva and Marth became acquainted in the Kaleos cabin ... and when Neva learned that Marth was born in Haiti and spoke Creole and French fluently — she immediately knew God had placed Marth at camp for Sophanica.

And Marth knew it, too!

During Cross Talk, Marth prayed and ministered to Sophanica in Creole. “The more I prayed and the more I talked,” Marth shared, “the more she melted into my shoulder.”

That night, in Golden, Mo. — some 1,774 miles from Haiti — God built a language bridge so that Sophanica could hear and understand His love for her. She asked Jesus into her heart.

*What a beautiful story, orchestrated by God, and empowered by friends like you who provided scholarship funds for Neva's foster children ... including Sophanica ... to attend KAA!*



# You Are Invited! Upcoming KAA Events:

## Golf Outing

Experience the game of golf on stunning courses in the heart of Ozark Mountain country with other players who share your heart and want to make a difference in the lives of youth from under-resourced communities.

KAA Cup/Payne Stewart Memorial Golf Event, June 8-10, 2025  
Courses: Payne's Valley, the new Cliffhangers course, & Buffalo Ridge (Entry includes 3 rounds of golf, 2 dinners, 2 lunches, 2 breakfasts, and an opportunity to tour KAA)

For more information or to register, contact Mark Parry at 417-263-0128 or [mark@kaakamps.org](mailto:mark@kaakamps.org).

## KAA Pheasant Hunt

Join KAA Outfitters for an awe-inspiring excursion outdoors — where encouraging relationships are built, and funds are raised to send campers for a life-changing week at KAA.

The KAA Pheasant Hunt has a suggested donation of \$8,000 (which sponsors an entire cabin for one week.) For questions or to book your outdoor adventure, contact Dave Janke at 417-263-1800 or [dave@kaakamps.org](mailto:dave@kaakamps.org) — or visit [kaakamps.org/outfitters](http://kaakamps.org/outfitters).

Pheasant hunting in Hanston, Kansas:  
January 15-17, 2025 — dinner January 15 through lunch January 17  
February 23-25, 2025 — dinner February 23 through lunch February 25

*\*Sign up soon — each hunt only has 10 spots available.*

## KAA Meet-up

Connect with KAA alumni, Kaleos, staff, partners, and friends for an amazing evening of fellowship, food, and fun on Friday, October 11, 2024, at 6-8 p.m. in Dallas. RSVPs are required; to attend, please text "TXOU" to 417-238-0212.



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