

# Loving With Your Whole Heart

A crisis and deep faith leads to charity for families in need

BY DENISE SCOTT

When your child has a life-threatening heart condition, it's all-consuming. You feel like the world should stop turning – but it doesn't. And food still has to be put on the table and bills still have to be paid.

That's where the Wholehearted Foundation steps in, providing spiritual, financial and peer support to meet the needs of "heart families" at Children's National Hospital in Washington. The nonprofit is based in Hamilton near Purcellville and was created in 2015 by local families who know only too well the challenges of having an ill child.

Founder Ryan Koppel, who grew up in Ashburn, has four sons with his wife, Kristen. One of them, Caleb, now 12, was born with Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome, a rare form of congenital heart disease that left him with essentially half a heart, requiring three open heart surgeries and countless other procedures.

"We got to experience what all of these congenital heart disease families go through, which is you're never fully prepared for this, even if you knew it was coming," he said. "And about half of the people, it's a surprise to them – and they're usually not short hospital stays."

Koppel said his family's faith in Christ was their anchor to weather the storm. And as the couple discussed how to help parents without the support of a good church or family or friends, they met Jacques and Emily Rancourt, whose two adopted children also had life-threatening heart conditions. Their common vision led to the Wholehearted Foundation.

The Koppels had chosen the name Caleb, which means "wholehearted" in Hebrew, before learning of his heart defect. And so the foundation was created and has raised – on average – over \$100,000 a year to meet its mission.

Because the Foundation verifies recipients, 95% of the applications – between



Caleb Koppel spent a lot of time in hospitals when he was a little boy. Today, he is a healthy and active 12-year-old.



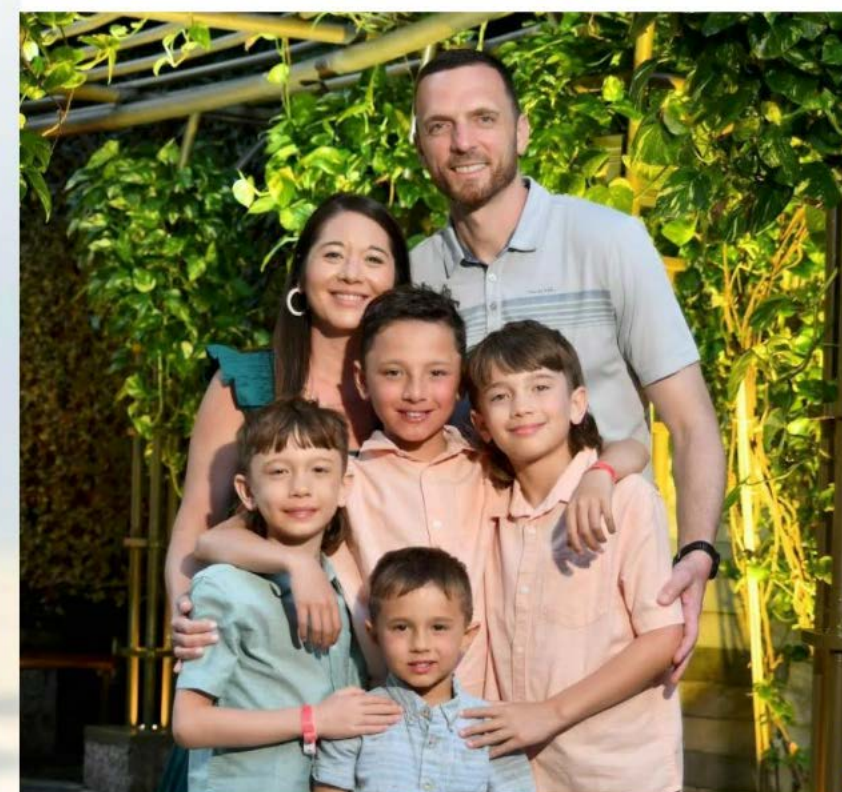
50 to 75 per year – come directly from a Children's National social worker. Families can apply for assistance through the foundation's website, but hospital verification is still required.

"We don't have a lot of expenses to our organization, so the vast majority of what is given to the Wholehearted Foundation gets poured into the work that we do," Koppel said, noting help can range from

Uber and grocery gift cards to mortgage and utility payments, funeral expenses, pastoral support or prayer.

"Or sometimes they just want to talk with a family that has a child with congenital heart disease," he adds.

The foundation also provides catered meals and care bags for parents who are often caught off guard by the extended hospital stay and need things such as toi-



Caleb Koppel (center) surrounded by his dad, Ryan, mom, Kristen, and his brothers – Jonah, Isaac and Micah.

leties, small snacks, pens and notepads.

Koppel says outreach expanded a few years ago to include the Tenwek Hospital in Kenya. About 30% of foundation resources help 500 families per year through a partnership with the founder of Leesburg nonprofit Faith Aid.

"It's just amazing that the dollar stretches so much farther in Africa," he said.

Although Koppel considers the foundation's work a ministry, there is no faith requirement.

"We help literally anybody and everybody that is sent our way," he said. "We just let people know why we help is because of our Christian faith. We just want to be a light in a dark time for people."

Koppel said Caleb is now largely living a normal life, doing well in school and playing golf.

"He knows that his life is being used in an amazing way through the work of Wholehearted Foundation that wouldn't exist without his journey," he said. "So I think hopefully he will take pride in that." ▀

## how to help

For more information and to learn how to help visit [wholeheartedfoundation.org](http://wholeheartedfoundation.org)



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