



## Transforming Pain Into Power

When Hunter Rodriguez was a healthy 14 month-old, the unthinkable occurred. His daycare provider, a person the Rodriguez family had trusted to nurture and protect their son, instead forcibly shook him. Hunter's injury was serious, and permanently life-altering for the family. His mother, Jackie Rodriguez, describes that time as "the day our world turned upside down."

"Hunter's story is so unique, because he was able to ask for understanding and give forgiveness. The world may never be exactly the same as it could have been if he had never been hurt, but together the family is creating their own world, and they're thriving," said Sirotnak.

Over subsequent weeks and months, Hunter was treated by the specialists at Kempe and Children's Hospital of Colorado,

Today, Hunter is a thriving young adult who enjoys hanging out with friends and his younger sister Hannah, playing video games, staying active and working at a local movie theater. He's also paying it forward through his volunteer work with Kempe.

[Hunter] has successfully broken all the barriers in his path, and transformed his painful experiences into a source of power and inspiration.

specifically by Dr. Andrew Sirotnak, a member of the Child Protection Team.

"Parents have to understand that shaking a baby is a form of severe physical abuse that can result in anything from a mild injury to a fatal injury," said Dr. Sirotnak. "Thankfully, Hunter got excellent medical care very quickly, and had very supportive, protective parents. I think that's what helped him the most."

After years of hard work and maintaining a positive, can-do attitude, Hunter has become a testament to what is possible after trauma. He has successfully broken all the barriers in his path, and transformed his painful experiences into a source of power and inspiration.

Despite the seemingly hopeless diagnoses – including being told that Hunter would be in a persistent vegetative state, and may not survive the next 24 hours – the Rodriguez family never gave up hope. For Hunter, Jackie, and Hunter's father Greg, every mention of the words "can't" or "won't" was an opportunity to push harder.

To those who are struggling to overcome their own post-abuse challenges, he says: "Don't give up. If you feel like you want to give up, know that anything is possible even if something is bad in your life. Push forward and don't ever give up."

"They told us there were cognitive issues and he wouldn't go beyond a third grade level. But he proved them wrong by graduating from high school last year," said Jackie. "It fills my heart with so much joy. Here's this kid who they said would never do anything, wouldn't even be able to walk. And now, not only is he running 5K races, he's beating his sister."

Nineteen-year-old Hunter recently felt a strong desire to meet with and speak to his abuser, a step that few survivors are willing or able to take. After a one-hour conversation, he made the courageous and incredibly compassionate decision to forgive her for what she had done to him. He described the experience as emotionally freeing, saying simply that, in that moment, "something went away."



(At right) Now 19, Hunter says to those who have suffered abuse "Push forward and don't ever give up."



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(Continued from inside)

### ★ Kempe Imagine 2017: Forty-Five Forward

April 22, 6 p.m.  
Join us for this signature dinner event honoring Kempe's 45 years as a Center of Excellence in the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect, and inspiring support for the future. More information available online at kempe.org



### ★ Save the Date—2017 Kempe Golf Tournament

Monday, August 14 | Cherry Creek Country Club  
The Kempe Golf Tournament returns to Cherry Creek Country Club. Spend a fun day with friends, clients and co-workers on this Jack Nicklaus designed course, all while helping Kempe to fulfill its mission to end child abuse and neglect. For information about sponsorship opportunities, contact Casey Carmichael, Director of Development at [carmichael.casey@kempe.org](mailto:carmichael.casey@kempe.org) or 303.864.5309.

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The Kempe Foundation

FOR THE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT  
OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT





## We Have Made a Difference

John D. Faught, President & CEO of The Kempe Foundation

Many years ago, I realized how much it made my heart hurt when I would read news stories about children who had been abused and neglected. I channeled this hurt into action, and began searching for groups who focused on keeping our children safe from harm. That is how my commitment to Kempe began 23 years ago.

Today, I still experience that same heartache, but am also encouraged by the strides we are making through our prevention programs, for example, SafeCare® Colorado, a program run in partnership with the Colorado Department of Human Services. A recent evaluation of the program showed families who completed this flexible, free and voluntary in-home parent support program were significantly less likely to have an open child welfare case as compared to similar Colorado families.

In truth, however, no matter how hard we might try to end child abuse and neglect, children continue to be harmed. If a child is harmed, we must then find appropriate treatments to help them heal and have the best opportunity for a healthy and productive life. That is why programs like Fostering Healthy Futures, an evidence-based youth development program for children in foster care who have experienced maltreatment, are so important. The program was incubated at Kempe, and

has been proven to have positive impacts on mental health, trauma, quality of life, and overall well-being for children who participate.

As we turn our thoughts towards Child Abuse Prevention Month, I want to share more with you about what Kempe does to prevent abuse from ever happening, and to help with intervention when a child is harmed.

In this issue, you will read a story about Hunter, a thriving young adult treated by Kempe professionals nearly 20 years ago. You will also read the story of one of our Kempe Ambassadors, Stephen, who is willing to identify as a victim in adulthood so that others may have hope that abuse is not the end of the story.

We hope these stories, along with our efforts to raise awareness of and funds for prevention and treatment, inspire you in your commitment to keep children safe from harm. I take comfort in knowing that together, you and I can make a difference in the life of a child.

Sincerely,

John Faught, Esq.  
President & CEO of The Kempe Foundation



## Happenings at Kempe: Child Abuse Prevention Month

Every April, Kempe raises awareness of child abuse prevention by partnering with organizations across Colorado to show kids we care.

### ★ Child Abuse Prevention Month Kick-off Rally

April 4, 11 a.m. | Colorado State Capitol – West Steps  
Join Kempe and other Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Campaign Partners to kick-off National Child Abuse Prevention Month in Colorado. Wear blue to show your commitment to the cause.

### ★ Kempe at the Capitol

April 3 – 7  
Each day, Kempe will share information with legislators about key programs related to prevention and treatment.

### ★ We All Play A Role Celebration

April 6, 9 a.m. | Children’s Hospital Colorado, Boettcher Atrium  
Join Kempe and Children’s Hospital Colorado as we acknowledge how “we all play a role” in preventing abuse and neglect. The atrium celebration will include remarks from professional staff, as well as education and activities for children and families.

### ★ Denver Human Services Family Wellness Resource Fair

April 7, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. | Denver Human Services Family Wellness Resource Fair  
Join partners from across the community to learn about the resources and the network of support available to families and community members in Denver.

### ★ Colorado Rockies Colorado Child Abuse Prevention Month Game

April 23, 1:10 p.m.  
Join the Colorado Rockies and Illuminate Colorado in cheering on Child Abuse Prevention Month. A portion of each ticket sold will further efforts in Colorado to prevent child maltreatment and build brighter childhoods. Discounted tickets available at [www.rockies.com/illuminate](http://www.rockies.com/illuminate) (Promo Code: CAPMONTH)

### ★ Let’s Get Social!

Join The Kempe Foundation on social media throughout April. We’ll share tips for engaging with the kids you care about and resources to help strengthen families. Use #TheStarlingProject #CAPM2017 to engage with us on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

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## Kempe Ambassador Stephen Dietrich— Moving From Acceptance to Integration

For Denver lawyer Stephen Dietrich, the key to moving forward after childhood trauma is not passive acceptance, but integration. Dietrich has weaved his experiences into the fabric of his adult life, acknowledging both the bad – and the good – that has surfaced as a result. He sees this as a path to relinquishing the shame and stigma that too often accompanies a history of abuse. Only through his work in therapy and personal introspection has this become possible.

“I needed to be hyper-aware in order to survive my childhood experiences. This was a training I wouldn’t wish on anyone, but it has ultimately helped me in numerous ways,” said Dietrich. “I have turned some of these coping mechanisms learned in the negative experiences into positive traits. I pay close attention to people – what they say, and how they act as well as my environment. This has been especially helpful in my career where I work closely with people.”

Not only is Dietrich a successful partner with one of the world’s largest law firms, he’s also served on philanthropic boards, has competed in multiple triathlons, and now serves as a Kempe Ambassador. He and his wife have a 14-year-old son, and he notes that having, and raising a child, has been one of the most therapeutic experiences of his life.

To others looking to move forward from a history of childhood abuse, he offers hope and encouragement. “You are strong enough to get through whatever you are facing today. Somehow your younger self found a way to survive, and that was probably the hardest thing you’ll ever have to do. If you could do it then – unintentionally – you can do it now, intentionally.”

*(At right) Kempe Ambassador Stephen Dietrich says raising a child has been one of the most therapeutic experiences of his life.*



## Be a Kempe Ambassador

The Kempe Ambassadors are a group of dedicated individuals engaged in supporting the mission and work of Kempe. The group works in concert with Kempe to provide awareness, education, advocacy and fundraising opportunities that will help end child abuse and neglect.

If you would like to learn more about the Kempe Ambassadors, please contact Casey Carmichael at [carmichael.casey@kempe.org](mailto:carmichael.casey@kempe.org). By becoming a Kempe Ambassador, you can make a difference in the life of a child.