

Inspiring the Next Generation of Humanitarians

An Interview with Robert Catalano, Founder, Kids for Kids Foundation



Robert Catalano

EDITORS' NOTE Robert Catalano founded the Kids for Kids Foundation (kidsforkidsnyc.org) in 2006. It is a community of friends, families, and colleagues that raises money for organizations that support children and families struggling with medical challenges. Catalano earned a bachelor's degree in business from St. John's University.

What was your vision for creating Kids for Kids Foundation and how do you define its mission?

I have always had a soft spot for kids, and as my business grew, it provided the opportunity to do more to support kids facing catastrophic medical issues. The idea was to create a community of friends, families, and colleagues raising money for organizations that support children and families struggling with medical challenges. Kids for Kids puts together



family-focused events that celebrate all that we have to be grateful for and serve to inspire the next generation of humanitarians – our children. We envision a time when all children struggling with health challenges can have a better future and a chance at life, and we strive to instill in our youth the importance of helping others, no matter their age.

We started by hosting an event at the Bronx Zoo and many of the families that attended that event were inspired and wanted to find ways to get involved and support our efforts. This helped me realize that the concept of hosting these events would work and my focus became on how to expand our reach.

We are focused on finding ways to get families and children involved in giving back, and the more we can open up opportunities for kids at younger ages to be involved in charity and philanthropy, the longer they will be able to make a difference throughout their lives.

What are the organizations that Kids for Kids supports?

Kids for Kids Foundation is committed to donating money to organizations that serve both children and their families. We support

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, an organization that is leading the way the world understands, treats, and defeats childhood cancer and other life-threatening diseases. We work with St. Mary's Hospital for Children, an organization that has a mission to improve the health and quality of life for children with special needs and life-limiting conditions, and their families. St. Mary's is New York's largest and most experienced provider of long-term care to children with medically complex conditions and New York City's only post-acute care facility. I remember walking the halls at St. Mary's and seeing firsthand the work they were doing for kids in need, and I knew it was an organization that fit our criteria. We support Maimonides Children's Hospital, an organization where patient care in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) is family-centered and where parents, siblings, grandparents, and other loved ones are seen as integral elements of the neonate's health and are included in care decisions at every step. In addition, we work with Cohen Children's Medical Center which is the top-rated children's hospital in New York State. Cohen's takes pride in building trusting relationships with the children and families they care for – and treat each one like they would their own. We have made 5- to 10-year fundraising commitments for naming rights of rooms at each of the hospitals.

The commonality with all the organizations we support is that they serve both children and their families.

Will you highlight the types of events that Kids for Kids holds?

We host all kinds of events throughout the year, from golf outings to family fun day at the Bronx Zoo to car racing at Monticello Motor Club to sporting clays. Our focus is hosting



Kids for Kids Fondation 2022 Race for a Cure event

quality events with a great network of people and guests where we are raising money and spreading awareness for the beneficiaries that we support.

We also developed a Junior Committee that is comprised of young volunteers ranging in age from 5 to 18 years old. This committee has grown to 61 members and they dedicate themselves to organizing year-round creative events, such as car washes, math-a-thons, bake sales, dance-a-thons, among others. We provide the tools and resources to help them with these events, and are working to inspire

the next generation to make a difference and give back. Through the passion of our Junior Committee members for helping others, they have been awarded over \$100,000 in school scholarships, received Service Awards from their own respected communities, and been accepted into distinguished and highly competitive college programs that range from medical research to world issues and service to their peers.

How valuable has it been for Kids for Kids to have such an engaged board and talented staff?

This is most important because when I first started it was me, a few friends, and employees of my company who were giving their time to help make it work. As the Foundation grew, it became too much of a burden on the people who worked for my company to keep giving so much of their time – it was as if they had a second job. We realized that we needed to hire full-time staff to work at the Foundation, and over time we needed to continue to grow.

The board has been critical and their support for Kids for Kids is truly amazing. They bring their specific hobbies and interests to the Foundation, and have been catalysts for some of our most successful events, whether it is car racing or sporting clays or golf outings.

Are you surprised at how the charity has grown over the years?

I never imagined Kids for Kids would have grown the way it has since its founding 15 years ago. I love the work we do and it has been a great experience for me. There is no better feeling than when I hear that we inspired someone to make a difference, and knowing that we are helping children and their families is an amazing feeling. ●



Kids for Kids 2022 car show event