



Capper Update

HOLIDAY EDITION

DECEMBER 2025

From fragile first breaths to fearless first steps...

Hazel's Bright Beginnings

When Hazel Martinek Cusick entered the world on May 9, 2023, her future was uncertain. Born at just 13 ounces, she spent her earliest months surrounded by monitors, tubes, and the constant vigilance of medical teams. "There were so many times when the room filled with people because her heart stopped or she stopped breathing," her father recalls. Doctors were uncertain if Hazel's lungs would ever be strong enough for her to come home.

But Hazel had other plans. After 378 days in the NICU, she finally made it home — a milestone her family had once only dreamed

"I think Hazel will be able to do whatever she wants to do. And I think it will be good things!"

Nikki Martinek Cusick,
Hazel's Mom



SCAN CODE TO VIEW
HAZEL'S STORY

of. Soon after arriving home, Hazel began therapy at Capper Foundation, marking the next step in her incredible journey.

When she first arrived, Hazel couldn't sit up without help. Physical and occupational therapists began gently introducing play, movement, and strength-building activities — from tummy time to reaching for brightly colored toys. Each small success became a celebration. Her therapists remember the moment Hazel first sat independently: the look of surprise on her face when she realized she could do it. That moment marked the start of a cascade of milestones — crawling, pulling herself up, and joyfully discovering

the simple freedom of being a kid.

Today, Hazel is busy exploring her world, laughing, playing, and showing a blossoming personality that shines as brightly as her smile. Her parents say every new skill feels like a miracle. "We didn't know if she would ever stand on her own," her father says. "Now she's trying to do it just because she's ready."

Hazel's progress is powered not only by her determination but by the generosity of Capper Foundation supporters. Each gift

helps bridge the funding gap for services like those Hazel receives — ensuring that every child, regardless of financial or medical challenges, has access to the therapies and encouragement needed to reach their full potential.

Every milestone Hazel achieves tells the story of what's possible when compassion meets opportunity. With support from donors and friends, more children like Hazel will take their first steps toward bright and independent futures.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Dear Friends,

This holiday season, we pause and celebrate you, the heart of Capper Foundation. Your continued support and generosity empowers children and adults with disabilities to achieve milestones once thought to be out of reach.

This year, that impact is reflected in stories like Hazel's, born at just 13 ounces and now joyfully exploring her world as a result of pediatric therapy received at Capper, and Kaitlyn's, who continues rebuilding her independence step by step through our Adult Services program in Winfield.

In Fiscal Year 2025, your support fueled growth across our organization, including two new Dialogue Coffee House locations and the

opening of the Caitlyn Halsey Empowerment Center, expanding inclusive employment and community engagement opportunities.

Because of you, last year over 4,500 Kansans with disabilities received the therapies, adaptive recreation, job training, individualized supports and community services they need to thrive. From early childhood breakthroughs to renewed independence in adulthood, your generosity makes progress possible.

Together, we continue building bright futures, guided by your belief in what every person can achieve. As the year ends, your continued support or year-end gift will help open even more doors ahead.

With deep gratitude,

Zach Ahrens, President & CEO

Help Us Build Abilities

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Every journey has a next step...

Kaitlyn's Inspiring Journey Back

At 18, Kaitlyn's life changed in an instant. A traumatic brain injury left her with debilitating physical disabilities and confined her to a wheelchair. The shift from a fully active teen to someone suddenly dependent on others was as devastating emotionally as it was physically. Over the next four years, she dedicated herself to intensive rehabilitation—step by step, relearning movements most people take for granted.

Now 23, Kaitlyn continues her journey at Capper Foundation's Adult Services program in Winfield. With support from staff who assist with daily living skills, community engagement, and transportation to physical therapy appointments, she is steadily working toward her goal of living independently again. Her dedication has already led to remarkable progress. She has lost 65 pounds since coming to Capper, allowing her to transition to a smaller wheelchair—opening opportunities once out of reach.

Kaitlyn's story is unique among adults served through Capper programs. While most participants were born with developmental or physical disabilities, her challenges came later in life. She faces a daily emotional balancing act—grieving what she's lost while embracing the progress she continues to make. Today, she is walking up to 400 steps and working on standing and pivoting, milestones that once felt impossible.

Capper staff provide individualized support that builds confidence and encourages independence. They work with Kaitlyn to set personal goals, whether that's navigating her wheelchair more efficiently, building friendships, or exploring new interests. With her improved mobility, she now enjoys attending concerts—including I Prevail, Warren Zeiders, Hollywood Undead, and



Rock of the '80s at the State Fair—with plans to see the Jonas Brothers soon. She also participates in bowling, movies, Friday outings, and Special Olympics Track & Field, with cheerleading ahead this winter.

Through the friendships she's formed at Capper, Kaitlyn has found belonging and renewed purpose. Group activities and shared experiences with other adults facing their own challenges have shown her that independence comes in many forms—and

that strength doesn't always mean walking unaided, but moving forward with hope.

Kaitlyn's story is a reminder that Capper Foundation's mission extends beyond diagnoses and labels. Thanks to generous donor support, Capper offers services that meet people where they are—helping each individual discover what's possible, no matter how their journey began, and ensuring they have the encouragement and opportunities needed to move forward with confidence.

Dialogue Coffee House Gift Cards

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JOIN IN THE SEASON OF GIVING

As the need for Capper Foundation's services grows larger, our donors continue to play a vital role in helping to ensure that our life-changing supports to children and adults with disabilities can reach more families.

Here are a few ways you can help us offer services to more families in the coming year:

- Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) from your IRA can reduce your tax liability
- Stock gifts transferred directly to Capper translate to the full value of your gift

- Memorials & Honorariums are a heartfelt way to recognize friends or family
- Planned Giving through wills and trusts helps sustain our future
- Facebook Birthday Fundraisers introduce Capper to your friends and show you care
- In-Kind Donations meet specific needs and help strengthen our bottom line

However you choose to give, you are helping a child or adult with disabilities find hope and possibility for a more fulfilled future.

www.capper.org



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Top 5% of charities nationwide for 12 consecutive years.

Capper Foundation is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS — VISIT WWW.CAPPER.ORG FOR MORE INFORMATION

2026 BLARNEY BREAKFAST

Saturday, March 14
7:00 AM to 10:00 AM
The Blind Tiger
Brewery & Restaurant
Topeka, KS

CONCERT FOR A CHILD

Friday, June 19
Featuring Zac Harmon
Everyday Plaza
Topeka, KS
More info to follow

IALOGUE COFFEE HOUSE IS A COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM OF CAPPER FOUNDATION.