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**Helping Alaskans with Differing Abilities Experience Hope Since 1968**

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Dear Friends,

I remember well the fundraising opportunities I participated in as a child and teenager; they gave me a connection to help solve world problems. Asking others to- “support my cause”- felt easy and natural because the outcomes; feeding the hungry, saving animals from death, housing for the homeless were tangible and impactful. At the time I don’t remember hearing the word “philanthropy”. The impulse to raise funds came from a desire to “make a difference” and to be part of initiatives far bigger than myself.

Some decades later philanthropy, “the love of mankind,” took on a deeper meaning as I began a career in social services and developed personal relationships with people with differing abilities, listened to their stories, and witnessed first-hand the impact giving had on individual lives. Martin Luther King Jr.’s statement “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is- what are you doing for others?”, became a clear philanthropic call to action for me- What could I do to make a positive difference for another? The opportunities to give time, talent, and resources to address unmet needs are abundant. In Alaska personal and collective investment creates a deeper connection one another and priceless outcomes result from actions we take to enhance the lives of others.

For 52 years the first Saturday in May has provided a unique opportunity for Alaskans to “do for others”. The Walk for Hope was first held in 1970- an event resulting from the tenacity and passion of Bob Halcro, a well -known Alaska businessman. The Walk was promoted to help fund the newly incorporated Hope Cottage and the children currently served, as well as to bring 66 children with disabilities, who were living in Oregon at Morningside Hospital back to Alaska. A childhood spent in an institution or in community? The choice was clear and over 4500 people, many of them youth, participated in the first Walk, raising \$137,000. The next year, 1971, 11,000 participated raising thousands to build homes for people with disabilities. Our gratitude for Bob Halcro and his investment in changing the “status quo” for those experiencing disabilities in Alaska is immense.

Through the years I have spoken to many who said, “I walked for Hope” and have fond memories of their hike across Anchorage. For all of you who hold that memory and have helped raise needed funds, your efforts and participation made a tremendous impact. Participating in the Walk for Hope, whether you realize it or not, you become an agent of social change- moving us closer to the vision where everyone is valued and has the opportunity to contribute to their community.

Fifty-two years later we are still walking on the first Saturday in May in support of that vision. Safe and secure housing, scholarships for summer camps, emergency outreach and crisis support, funds for technology, behavior support, recreation funds- these are only some of the ways Walk for Hope funds are used to help meet unfunded needs. Over 800 individuals across Alaska are still waiting for traditional state funding for disability supports. Walk for Hope funds provide a bridge for those individuals and families in need and assist those waiting for support.

For me, the first Saturday in May is dedicated to investing in the vision Bob Halcro and others shared 52 years ago - to reduce barriers for people with differing abilities to have full and meaningful lives. Collectively we can make a difference. We can ensure resources are available to support people with differing abilities to thrive in their communities of choice. We can stand together to build communities that embrace and celebrate diversity. We can heed the call to “do for others” with action.

I will be walking for Hope on Saturday, May 1 with deep appreciation for the thousands of Alaskans who have walked through the years to help their friends, family members, and fellow Alaskans. This pandemic may keep us distanced physically, but it can’t keep us from coming together to share purpose and vision!

Please join me!

<https://secure.ggiv.com/event/w4h52/>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michele Girault". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michele" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Girault".

Michele Girault  
Executive Director  
Hope Community Resources, Inc.