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From Coast to Coast, Volunteers Help Make Dreams Come True

Volunteer work is not always glamorous. Some days you're serving freshly cooked meals to those in need, but others you may be stuffing and sealing envelopes. The gratification comes from the aid you're providing, not necessarily the specific job you are doing to achieve it.

Make-A-Wish® Foundation of America volunteers can play a large role in making dreams become a reality for kids and teenagers who have a life-threatening medical condition. This is called "wish granting." Staff and volunteers work with Wish Kids to determine what they wish for most – whether it's meeting a movie star, having a superhero party or being a runway model for a day – and then help to make that wish come true for the child.

Cathy Scott, a contract specialist at the Federal Bureau of Prisons, joined the Make-A-Wish® Mid-Atlantic chapter as a volunteer back in October 2010 and has assisted in making 29 wishes come true since joining.

She recalls her first wish-granting experience fondly. It was for a 4-year-old girl whose wish was to swim with dolphins. "What struck me most and keeps me volunteering is the impact the wish has on not only the Wish Child but the whole family," she says. "In this family, the dad worked three jobs to make ends meet while mom stayed in the hospital, and the sibling stayed with a nanny or other relatives. When we presented the tickets and itinerary to the Dad, he cried. He said he could not get over total strangers giving this vacation to his family."

Make-A-Wish® covers all the expenses for the Wish Kid and their family to relieve them of



◆ Volunteers from Walk for Wishes®.

financial worries.

It's this type of hands-on work – both meeting the Wish Kids and their families, and being part of their wish-granting



◆ Make-A-Wish® volunteer JD Kristenson shows a wish family how to use chopsticks at a post-wish meal.

experience – that motivates Scott to continue volunteering with Make-A-Wish®.

On the other side of the country, JD Kristenson balances being a Make-A-Wish® volunteer with his full-time job as the commanding officer of a San Diego-based U.S. Navy warship.

"Military service can make it tough to commit to any organization because of frequent deployments and

relocations," he says. With its national reach, Make-A-Wish® ended up being a perfect fit for Kristenson.

His participation with Make-A-Wish® has run the gamut since he joined in October 2014, from public speaking to greeting Wish Kids and their families at the airport to his newest endeavor of mentoring newly trained wish granters.

Of all his roles, helping to grant wishes for kids has been the most gratifying. Like Scott, Kristenson is fueled by the personal interactions and connections that he makes through helping to grant wishes.

Case in point, he recalls a recent wish-granting experience for two sisters who both wanted to go on a shopping spree. "I was in the back of the van with her younger brother who was accompanying us on the wish," Kristenson says. "He turned to me and said 'This is the best day of my life!' The next day, we were back there again granting his other sister's wish, and he said to me, 'Now *this* is the best day of my life!' Responses like that from the Wish Kids and their family make it all worthwhile."

Story by Tara Shubbuck
Make-A-Wish® Foundation of
America CFC #11375

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PHOTO COURTESY OF JD KRISTENSON