

BURBANK LEADER

[Print Page](#)

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News

Burn center celebrates 35

Foundation that made 'Stop, drop and roll' a household phrase continues to help survivors.

By Rachel Kane

BURBANK — The Alisa Ann Ruch Burn Foundation of Burbank on Sunday will celebrate 35 years of serving burn victims.

The nonprofit organization that popularized the phrase, "Stop, drop and roll," has expanded from an action-based venture for fire prevention and care to an organization that provides aid, solace and emotional security for almost 2,000 burn survivors every year.

"We offer support groups, connection to resources, monetary resources," said Scott Vandrick, executive director of the foundation.

The foundation's main focus is its work with child burn victims and prevention of household accidents with fire and burns involving children, Vandrick said.

Concern about children's fire safety was the impetus for the foundation, named for founder Diane Host's 8-year-old daughter, Alisa Ann Ruch, who died of a barbecue-related fire more than 35 years ago that burned more than 95% of her body.

The foundation offers stipends to families, activities for child and adult burn victims and programs with firefighters and local schools throughout the state that provide fire safety tips and information.

"Sometimes a family will have a burned child, but they don't have the means to be at the hotel that's near the hospital, so we offer financial stipends," Vandrick said. "And then on the other side we do prevention work."

The foundation offers programs for juvenile fire setters, children who frequently light fires for fun or play with matches and lighters. The programs provide counseling and parent education.

But Champ Camp, a weeklong summer camp for burn victims 5 to 20 years old, is the foundation's flagship program, said Renee Cozens, the associate executive director who manages the camp and the foundation's survivor services programs.

"They get to see 100-plus other kids who are like them and at different stages in life," Cozens said.

Children at the camps have often undergone numerous surgeries and experienced a painful, traumatic experience associated with their burns.

The hiking, boating, horseback riding, go-cart racing and other leisure activities the children participate in add enjoyment and relaxation to social situations, which may have otherwise been awkward.

"That was a pretty cool camp because there were other people who had burns," said Angel Castelan, a 19-year-old from Panorama City who has been participating in Champ Camp and other foundation events for nine years.

“You learn to basically cope with it and be OK about it,” Castelan said. “There are some people who think they are the only ones, but you see that you’re not the only one. It’s really great that they have this camp. It gives an opportunity to burn survivors to experience what some of them were afraid to do before.”

The foundation, based in Burbank, is serving a dozen burn victims from the Burbank, Glendale and North Hollywood region, Vandrlick said, with about 160 children from all over the country.
