

Emily Progin, Content Manager
eprogin@helphopelive.org / 800.642.8399
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\$4,000 RAISED TO HELP 23-YEAR-OLD REFUGEE WITH CEREBRAL PALSY April 26 Music & Food Fundraiser Will Give New Hope to Yonan Matti

EL CAJON, Calif.—Yonan Matti is an Iraq refugee living with cerebral palsy. Now a proud American citizen, Yonan has a vibrant life and personality—but he’s missing one key ingredient to greater connection and health: an accessible van.

Online fundraising and an April 26 special event will raise funds and hope through the nonprofit Help Hope Live in honor of Yonan.

Fundraiser Details

When: Sunday, April 26 from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Where: Elks Lodge at 1400 East Washington, El Cajon, CA 92019

What: Rock, Reggae & The Road fundraiser with delicious Mexican dinner from Rita’s Catering, bar, auctions, giveaways, and live reggae & classic rock music.

Cause: Help Hope Live in honor of Yonan Matti. Yonan is fundraising for an accessible van, which insurance does not cover.

Cost: Tickets are \$60. Increase your impact with sponsorships starting at just \$50.

Register: <https://events.helphopelive.org/event/6997/signup/>

Can’t Make It? Donate: <https://helphopelive.org/campaign/25854/>

Event Contact: Liz Castagnera at castagnerae@gmail.com or (619) 206-3189

Yonan’s Story

In 2016, Yonan’s family fled violence and war in Iraq. Now American citizens, their life in America has opened up new possibilities for Yonan, who lives with cerebral palsy—from communication to education to gaming and beyond.

Now 23, Yonan is vibrant and full of humor and determination. His diagnosis impacts his ability to move, eat, and speak, but Yonan has been able to learn to communicate fluently in both Arabic and English using eye-gaze technology.

“Yonan experienced school for the first time after coming to the US,” explained his friend and caregiver Liz Castagnera. “It was not possible for a child with his level of needs in Iraq. He fell in love with learning.”

Yonan attends California State University San Marcos once per week through the Aspiring Scholars program. His dream is simple: to one day work at a school and help others.

A gamer in his downtime who uses his eyes to play Xbox, Yonan loves to work out, tell jokes, and make people laugh. He’s also a loving uncle to 2 adorable nieces.

To keep connecting, Yonan needs one key ingredient not covered by insurance: a wheelchair accessible van. He’s missing special moments, education opportunities, and medical appointments due to lack of accessible transportation—including going to church, hanging with friends, and attending classes.

“His classes meet two days per week, but he can only attend one day per week due to the lack of transportation,” explained Liz. “He’s also unable to start the internship component of his program, which is an essential part of building a future career.”

Though an accessible van is a necessity to allow Yonan to pursue critical medical care, insurance will not cover the cost, leaving him on the hook for \$40,000 to \$90,000 out of pocket. “The van doesn’t need to be new, but it needs to be dependable,” explained Liz. “It will completely transform his life.”

That’s why Yonan and his loving community started fundraising with the trusted national nonprofit Help Hope Live. Donations are tax deductible at:

<https://helpholive.org/campaign/25854/>

His community has already raised over \$4,000 towards his \$60,000 goal for a reliable van. “It will mean freedom, opportunity, and connection,” said Liz.

Yonan has shared special messages to his community on his fundraising page. See his Thanksgiving 2025 video update, accompanied by his radiant smile, at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfofX1xQww8>

“There is so much on my list to be thankful for,” Yonan says in the video. “I still have a lot of needs, but I’m healthy. I’m thankful I get to go to college. I’m thankful for my doctors, teachers, and family. I have such good friends in my life.”

Donations to Help Hope Live are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law, and all funds raised will be administered by the nonprofit to cover verified medical and related expenses. Help Hope Live verifies medical and financial need for every patient.

Help Hope Live is a national nonprofit that specializes in engaging communities in secure, tax-deductible fundraising campaigns for people who need a transplant or are affected by a catastrophic injury or illness. Since 1983, campaigns organized by Help Hope Live have raised over \$193 million to pay patient expenses, assisting more than 25,000 patient families. ###