MONTEREY BAY parent

Kristi Yamaguchi Helps Hope Services Raise $168,000 at Monterey Gala

By Sabrina Hiltunen | October 23, 2026

Key Takeaways

- Hope Services is a nonprofit that has supported people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families for more than 70 years, serving more than 4,000 individuals across nine counties from locations in Seaside, Salinas, and Watsonville.
- Hope Services' Coast Cares Gala, held September 12 at the Monterey Bay Aquarium, raised more than $168,000, beating its $150,000 goal through auctions, corporate sponsorships, and individual donations.





"Everyone wants that chance to live independently and to contribute to our community," said Olympic figure skater and world champion Kristi Yamaguchi. "I love that Hope Services looks for those opportunities, informs their families where to find those opportunities, and helps create them with businesses."

Yamaguchi was the guest of honor at Hope Services' Coast Cares Gala, held September 12 at the Monterey Bay Aquarium. The organization set a goal of raising $150,000 that evening and surpassed it, bringing in more than $168,000 through live and silent auctions, corporate sponsorships, and individual donations.

Hope Services is a nonprofit that has supported people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) for more than 70 years. It serves more than 4,000 individuals with IDD and their families across nine counties, with locations in Seaside, Salinas, and Watsonville. Gala proceeds support employment, community connection, mental health and wellness, and family support programs.

"People with IDD and their families are often overlooked, invisible, and not included, and as a result, we miss out on that as a culture," said Hope Services CEO Aila Malik.

A Shared Mission

Monterey Bay Parent feature writer Sabrina Hiltunen sat down with Yamaguchi to talk about her connection to Hope Services and its parallels with her own nonprofit, Always Dream. "It is important to meet people where they are so they have the opportunity to reach their potential," Yamaguchi said. "I see so many parallels between the work that Always Dream does for our students and Hope Services' clients. Everyone has the potential to make an impact and to have the right to dream."

Art That Works

Guests enjoyed performances by The New Hope Band, a group made up of Hope Services clients, and shopped handmade items from Hope Studio.

The art program serves 125 clients daily, and it's growing. "We are currently working on building a new space for the arts program, and at the beginning of the year we are going to be hiring 12 artist staff," said April Basuini, Community Support Facilitator and manager of the art program. "Weaving really helps our autistic young men channel their energy because when they are sitting on a loom, they are using their feet and hands and creating a tangible product." Weaving also builds patience, focus, perseverance through mistakes, and pattern recognition.

Hope Services client Donna demonstrated weaving at the gala, teaching guests and creating pieces throughout the evening. Her seizure disorder and intellectual disability make it difficult to work in the community, so creating products for Hope Studio is her job. Artists receive a 50% commission on sales, and each piece carries the artist's name and a QR code linking to the Hope Studio website.

One Person at a Time

In the aquarium's auditorium, Malik welcomed guests before Yamaguchi joined her onstage for a fireside chat. Attendees also heard the story of Lisa, a Hope Services client for more than 30 years, and the resilience she has shown in overcoming loss and challenges with the support of Hope Services and its donors.

Asked how people can support individuals with IDD, Yamaguchi said, "It does not take a lot; it is just caring and being there for the community. We are not trying to change the world, but one person at a time. One person can make a difference, and it feels great."

"I invite you to imagine what could be possible if we thrived like an ecosystem, if we knew that every single one of us is essential to the whole collective."
— Aila Malik, CEO, Hope Services