

Laura Hope Whitaker Announces The Joy Exchange, Rooted in Two Decades of Building Belonging with Those Often Overlooked

CEO of Extra Special People announces book release and nationwide Joy Parade book tour sponsored by Loverly Grey

ATHENS, GA, UNITED STATES, February 17, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Laura Hope Whitaker, [CEO of ESP](#), releases her debut book, [The Joy Exchange](#), a heartfelt invitation to rethink joy not as something rare to chase, but as something we can practice, exchange, and multiply every day.

Rooted in real relationships and lived experience, The Joy Exchange draws from Whitaker's two decades leading ESP as CEO, during which the organization has grown from a local program into a multi-community nonprofit serving more than 1,300 families across Georgia, with its first out-of-state community launching in 2026.

The nationwide Joy Parade book tour, sponsored by Loverly Grey, begins in Athens, Georgia at ESP's annual Big Hearts Gala, a milestone event celebrating 40 years of ESP and welcoming more than 1,000 individuals in support of the members and families served throughout the year. Following the February 17 release of The Joy Exchange, the tour will continue to more than ten cities across the United States.

The Joy Exchange is not a traditional leadership book, nor is it simply a collection of inspiring stories. Instead, Whitaker offers a simple but challenging idea: joy is something we create together. With warmth, candor, and humor, she reflects on what she has learned from individuals our culture often overlooks—lessons about presence, courage, hospitality, and what it truly means to belong.

"What if joy isn't something we stumble upon," Whitaker asks, "but something we choose to exchange with the person right in front of us?"



Author, Laura Hope Whitaker

Through personal stories and moments from the ESP community, Whitaker invites readers to trade comfort for connection, hesitation for hospitality, and problems for purpose. The result is both deeply personal and broadly resonant. It is an invitation to see differently, love boldly, and rediscover the transformative power of everyday encounters.

Whitaker stepped into leadership at ESP at just 19 years old and has spent the last 20 years learning alongside the very community she serves. Over time, ESP expanded across Georgia, launching innovative programs and employment pathways while also building nationally recognized brands including [Java Joy](#) and SEEABILITY, which help drive awareness and connection far beyond state lines. Throughout its growth, ESP has remained grounded in a single belief: every person has inherent worth, and joy grows when it is shared.

The upcoming Joy Parade book tour will extend that message beyond the page. Designed as a series of community gatherings, the tour will bring people together around stories of joy, belonging, and mutual transformation. Loverly Grey's sponsorship and presence at many tour stops reflects a shared commitment to using influence for good - to create welcoming spaces where people feel seen, valued, and connected.

The spirit of The Joy Exchange is also captured in its cover art, created by Suzanne Goossens, an ESP member, Joyrista with ESP's Java Joy program, and artist known for her ability to make people feel deeply seen. Suzanne created the painting just months after the passing of her own mother, knowing of Whitaker's longtime connection to dandelions - an image that weaves



Laura Hope Whitaker with the Joy Parade Team



Laura Hope Whitaker with cover artist and dear friend Suzanne Goossens

through the book's pages. When asked by the publisher to select the book's cover, Whitaker knew immediately that Suzanne's artwork was the perfect visual expression of the story being told. Why dandelions matter, and what they come to represent, is something Whitaker leaves for readers to discover inside the book.

Praise for *The Joy Exchange* has come from leaders across faith, culture, business, and community, including Bob Goff, Kirby Smart, Dan T. Cathy, and others who describe the book as both inspiring and transformative - a timely reminder that joy multiplies when it is shared.

The Joy Exchange is available nationwide on February 17, 2026.

About Laura Hope Whitaker

Laura Hope Whitaker is the CEO of ESP, a Georgia-based nonprofit creating transformative experiences for individuals with disabilities and their families. She has led the organization for more than 20 years and is a nationally recognized speaker and nonprofit leader focused on building joy-filled communities rooted in dignity, belonging, and connection.

About ESP (Extra Special People)

ESP is a nonprofit organization based in Georgia that serves individuals with disabilities and their families through programs focused on connection, joy, and transformative community experiences. ESP serves more than 1,300 families across multiple Georgia communities, is expanding into its first out-of-state community in 2026, and drives national awareness through its growing brands Java Joy and SEEABILITY.

About Lovely Grey

Lovely Grey, founded by influencer and entrepreneur Brittany Sjogren, is a fashion and lifestyle brand dedicated to helping women feel confident in what they wear and encouraged in who they are. What began as a personal style blog has grown into a multi-platform community offering daily outfit inspiration, accessible styling tips, and thoughtfully curated recommendations. Based in Athens, Georgia, Lovely Grey inspires women nationwide through relatable storytelling, timeless style, and a commitment to authenticity and connection.

Chris Fralish

ESP Inc.

[email us here](#)

Visit us on social media:

[LinkedIn](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Facebook](#)

[YouTube](#)

[Other](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/893170916>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2026 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.