

Children's Cancer Network

Providing Hope and Healing to Children and Families

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Children's Cancer Network is an Arizona-based nonprofit organization that provides financial and psychosocial assistance to children and families dealing with pediatric cancer. Through patient and family services and/or patient and family education, this organization strives to address the needs of this special population identified by the pediatric oncology healthcare professionals. The outcome of these programs has been overwhelmingly positive for the patients and families.

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HEARING THE WORDS "Your child has cancer" is probably the most devastating experience of one's life. Most parents would change places with their child in a second to spare them the pain and anguish of the debilitating cancer treatments. As so many families have learned, cancer is not discriminatory. Children and families from all backgrounds have experienced the highs and lows in the fight against childhood cancer. Witnessing the courage of these children and families as they walk this road together is humbling. Sharing the joys of remission and the heartaches of relapse or death can be a life-changing experience.

Inspired by cancer survivor Jeff Luttrell's 7-year battle with acute lymphoblastic leukemia, Children's Cancer Network was formed to give hope to these families and let them know that they are not alone in their battle. In 2004, Jeff's sister, Jenny, had a vision to help these families in need. While visiting her brother in the hospital one night during his hospitalization for a cord blood transplant, a young girl in the next room

passed away. Her family was at her bedside to say their goodbyes. Shortly after her passing, it was realized that the family did not have money to put gas in their car to get home to Phoenix. This was an eye-opening experience for Jenny, then a high school freshman. It did not seem fair that a family grieving for the loss of their daughter also had to worry about finding cash to make the drive home to Phoenix. That night, the family received the money they needed and the vision of Children's Cancer Network was born.

Children's Cancer Network is an Arizona-based nonprofit organization reaching out to these pediatric oncology patients and their families. The mission of this organization is to provide assistance to these families in need, either financially or psychosocially, through patient and family services and/or through patient and family education. This mission has been realized time and time again over the past 5 years through the unique partnership of Children's Cancer Network with the local pediatric oncology health teams from Banner Children's Hospital, Phoenix Children's Hospital, and St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center.

Guided by these dedicated health professionals and the talented, hard-working Children's Cancer Network Board, this 501c3 organization addresses a variety of needs for these families through the provision of

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patient and family services. These services include the gas and food card program, the John W. Luttrell scholarship program, and the "Holiday Surprises" adopt-a-family program. In addition, Children's Cancer Network supports Ronald McDonald House in Phoenix by furnishing and maintaining one of the efficiency apartments for families needing housing while their child undergoes treatment. The tremendous response to each of these patient and family service programs illustrates the increasing financial needs of these families because of the challenges imposed by the current economy as well as the overwhelming cost of healthcare. Children's Cancer Network's response has been to increase fundraising efforts and programming to assist in meeting this demand.

To address the education needs of this population, Children's Cancer Network offers a biannual multitrack childhood cancer survivorship conference for school-aged and young adult survivors, family members, and healthcare providers. At a minimal cost to the families, the conference focuses on the physical and psychosocial effects of childhood cancer and its treatment along with the options and resources of management and coping. Featuring national and local experts, this comprehensive workshop offers a full day of education, networking, and support for each participant. In September 2007, the 140 participants at the second biannual conference, "Childhood Cancer Survivorship: Keys to Empowerment," offered rave reviews for this comprehensive workshop. Planning for the 2009 conference is under way with enthusiasm from survivors, family members, health-

care providers, and the Children's Cancer Network team.

Finally, Children's Cancer Network presents their annual fashion show, auction, and luncheon. Although this is the main fund-raiser for the organization, this event also serves as a significant means to fulfill the organization's mission. Spotlighting children who are cancer survivors and their siblings in a fun and positive way boosts self-esteem and family morale during a time when it is most needed. In addition, survivors and families network with others dealing with childhood cancer who are in various phases of treatment. The outcome is an outpouring of support and encouragement that results in strength and determination in these young survivors and their families. This opportunity to participate in the event also empowers the families as they contribute to the fight against cancer.

The ongoing financial and psychosocial effects of childhood cancer for children and families can be daunting. In partnership with the pediatric oncology healthcare teams, Children's Cancer Network strives to make a difference in the lives of these children and families. According to childhood cancer survivor, scholarship winner, and model Sarah Maurer (written communication, August 28, 2008), Children's Cancer Network helps restore and "bring to life the once broken and lost dreams of a normal life." It is an honor and privilege to work with these children and families in an effort to provide hope and healing in the ongoing battle with childhood cancer. To learn more about Children's Cancer Network, please visit the organization's Web site at www.childrenscancernetwork.org.