

Back to School: back to the business of normalizing cancer in the classroom

A successful return to school is one of the hardest hurdles for children undergoing cancer treatment. Feelings of acceptance, missed school days and exposure to illness are some of the issues children with cancer and their parents face in making the often complicated transition from patient to student.

Dealing with a student's re-entry can take an emotional toll at the school, as well.

"When a child is diagnosed with cancer, it can be a scary time for teachers and classmates," said Connie Nicolosi, LCSW, pediatric social worker at Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital. "Children with cancer want to be treated just like everyone else, but often teachers and friends are uncertain how to act around them."

For the past 20 years, Nicolosi and other professionals at Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital, have been addressing these and other concerns through the "Back to School" program, a free seminar for teachers, school nurses, guidance counselors and school administrators affected by childhood cancer. The Back

to School team includes Diana Beardsley, MD; Carolyn Demsky, advanced practice RN; Erica Schwartz, child life specialist; and



Members of the Back to School team (l-r): Erica Schwartz, Connie Nicolosi, Dr. Diana Beardsley and Carolyn Demsky.

Nicolosi, who offer their respective expertise in helping school personnel better understand the needs of students who are actively receiving cancer treatment, as well as students who have completed treatment.

"Going back to school can be a sign that life is returning to normal," said Demsky, a pediatric oncology nurse at Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital who has been helping sensitize schools to the needs of children with cancer for the past five years. "We want to give schools the tools to help a child feel as normal as possible."

Dedicated to treating the child with cancer as a

whole, the Tommy Fund recognizes the importance of helping educators understand the complexities associated with childhood cancer addressed in the Back to School program in three main ways: by helping school systems be as prepared and comfortable as possible when a student with cancer returns to school; offering parents emotional sup-

port by giving them another voice in the overwhelming process of cancer; and providing a sense of relaxation to kids, by assuring them that both their teachers and peers will be ready to embrace their return.

Some of the topics covered in the Back to School program include: transitioning the child back into the classroom, how to handle an emergency in the school, and potential learning issues a child may encounter throughout the treatment spectrum and after therapy is completed.

Plans are underway for the 2009 Back to School program, which will be sponsored in part by The Tommy Fund. For more information, call 203-688-7519. ☎

Golf Tournament



Twelve-year-old Zachary Pollock spoke about his experience with cancer to the 180 golfers, guests and volunteers at the 2008 Tommy Fund Invitational Golf Tournament which raised more than \$88,000. He summed it best by saying, "Cancer Sucks." Zach will complete his treatment in January 2009.

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family in need of assistance. This is a wonderful chance for schools, businesses, clubs, families and individuals to participate in the season of giving by fulfilling the wish list of families with children undergoing cancer treatment. Please call the Tommy Fund at 800-974-5559, or email tommyfund@ynhh.org, for more information.

Many thanks for your generosity and heartfelt support.

Warm regards,
Michelle D'Amore
Executive Director

Mission Statement

The Tommy Fund was established to provide emotional, educational, medical and recreational support to children with cancer and their families; and to improve the cure rate of childhood cancer through the Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital and the Yale School of Medicine.

Find us online at www.tommyfund.org
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TOMMY FUND IS LOOKING OUT FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT

The Tommy Fund is going green. If you would like to receive the Tommy Fund News via email, please email us at tommyfund@ynhh.org with your email address.

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Tommy Fund News



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President's Welcome

By Tom Brunnock

Since its inception in 1953, the Tommy Fund for Childhood Cancer has supported the fight against pediatric cancers and has helped make a compelling difference in the lives of families with children undergoing cancer treatment. The Tommy Fund's goal is to meet the needs of patients and their families – from treatment, to research, to simply helping families pay for parking or cope with their daily lives.

The core of the Tommy Fund's mission is promise and hope. In supporting efforts such as funding fellowships in pediatric oncology, the Tommy Fund recognizes that individuals like Sarah Lo, MD, MPH, a new first-year fellow who began in July, will be the scientific leaders of the future in the specialty of pediatric oncology.

The Tommy Fund is part of many exciting initiatives including Yale's newly-expanded pediatric hematology/oncology practice. This will provide children from all over Connecticut with easier access to pediatric specialists and clinical trials, as well as a program for educators affected by childhood cancer. (More information on these events is included in this newsletter.)

There are many challenges that lie ahead in the fight against childhood cancer. We are dedicated to continuing the fight that Tommy Mozdierz began more than 50 years ago.

In these times of hardship, we appreciate your generosity and support for the Tommy Fund for Childhood Cancer.

Sincerely,
Tom Brunnock
President

Tommy's mother takes to the WPLR airwaves to say "thank you"



Marion Yedynak

Last August, Marion Yedynak traveled from her home in Edgewater, Florida, to WPLR in Milford, to make an on-air appearance on the Chaz and AJ morning show. Marion, the mother of Tommy Mozdierz, for whom the Tommy Fund is named, wanted to personally thank radio listeners and the WPLR staff for their support of the WPLR Radiothon to benefit the Tommy Fund.

"Although it's been 55 years since Tommy died, people are still moved by my story," said Marion, whose clarity of reminiscences belies the number of years gone by. "It's like it happened yesterday.

I think that's how it is with any parent who has lost a child."

Marion's story, and the stories of other children with cancer, was told during the two-day inaugural fundraiser held last February at the WPLR studio in Milford. Morning co-hosts Chaz and AJ kept the phone lines ringing with heartfelt

pleas to the listening audience that generated nearly \$114,000 in pledges for Tommy Fund-supported programs.

During her visit to the WPLR studio, Marion recalled the life-changing day in 1952 when her son, Tommy Mozdierz, was diagnosed with cancer.

"I'll never forget the Saturday morning Tommy wasn't feeling well," said Marion. "He was pale and listless."

Marion brought Tommy to his pediatrician who admitted him that afternoon to New Britain General Hospital, where he underwent several tests and a blood transfusion.

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A Message from the Executive Director

The Tommy Fund had a busy late summer and early fall. We hired a new event coordinator, Shannon Sullivan, who brings a global perspective to the Tommy Fund, having recently served as an event planner for Freedom Alliance, a non-profit organization that provides support to military troops, veterans and their families. As the Tommy Fund event coordinator, Shannon is responsible for fund-raising and program events, Web site maintenance and volunteer coordination.

In August, I had the pleasure to appear on-air with Marion Yedynak (Tommy's mother), on the WPLR morning show with co-hosts Chaz and AJ. Marion, who lives in Florida, made a special trip to WPLR this past summer, to thank listeners and the WPLR staff for their support of the WPLR Radiothon to Benefit the Tommy Fund. Our friends from WPLR told us how thrilled they were to meet Marion, who has promised to call in with a weather report during the 2009 Radiothon. Please mark your calendars for February 26 & 27 and be sure to phone in with your pledge!

As part of Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, the Tommy Fund celebrated September with the second annual "Uncork a Cure" wine-tasting event and the 16th annual Tommy Fund Family Day. Both events were a huge success with record numbers of participants and increased awareness around childhood cancer.

I am pleased to announce that this holiday season there will be a special giving opportunity for persons interested in adopting a

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Tommy's mother...continued from page 1

The following Monday, his doctor delivered the unimaginable news.

"The doctor cried as he told me that Tommy had leukemia and that there was nothing they could do. I felt so alone," said Marion, who believes that Tommy was the first known case of childhood leukemia in Connecticut.

The Tommy Fund for Childhood Cancer was established in 1953 in honor of Tommy Mozdzier, who died of acute leukemia that same year – just two weeks before his fifth birthday. Before his death, Tommy managed to garner the attention of an entire state, including the local

fire department that knew of his passion for firemen and fire trucks. To help his family pay for his medical care, members of the fire department from Tommy's hometown of New Britain raised nearly \$1,000, and, after Tommy's death, they raised an additional \$8,000 for statewide leukemia research at Yale University.

"Tommy's illness has given me a lot of insight to other people," said Marion. "I can't put into words. It's very hard, but very moving to know so many of you are doing so much to support the Tommy Fund. I thank you from the bottom of my heart." ❁

Tommy's Friends

The Tommy Fund for Childhood Cancer would like to recognize the following donors for becoming one of Tommy's Friends. To learn how you can become one of Tommy's Friends, contact the Tommy Fund at 800-974-5559.

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Yale pediatric hematology/oncology expands services

Helping to provide access to the finest oncology services available to families undergoing childhood cancer treatment is an important mission of the Tommy Fund. "Kids with cancer have lots of needs that require serious care by gifted caregivers, along with consolidated and innovative treatment," said Tom Brunnock, Tommy Fund president.

Recognizing this need, the Yale School of Medicine integrated the Pediatrics Hematology/Oncology Associates of Guilford into its practice on July 1. The merger – the first of its kind in southeastern Connecticut – enables area children requiring diagnostic, weekly or follow-up cancer and hematology care to receive comprehensive outpatient diagnostic services and on-site complex day therapy in two locations.

According to Gary Kupfer, MD, chief of pediatric hematology/oncology at Yale, the merger is an enhancement of the two organization's long-standing cooperation in pediatric oncology care. "Both Yale and Guilford have long been committed to caring for patients with cancer," said Dr. Kupfer. "What's key about our expansion is that we are all together under one roof to provide patients with comprehensive care and cutting edge therapies."

The pediatric hematology/oncology section currently treats 80-100 new cancer cases annually at Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital. It is a major component of the Yale Cancer Center and is the only practice in Connecticut to offer a cancer survivorship program. The HEROS (Health, Education, Research and Outcomes for Survivors of Childhood



Members of the pediatric hematology/oncology section (l-r) are: Drs. Gary Kupfer, Nina Kadan-Lottick, Joseph McNamara, Kavita Dhodapkar, Farzana Pashankar, Diana Beardsley and Sarah Lo. Missing from photo: Dr. Paul Jubinsky.

Cancer) Clinic has been supported by the Tommy Fund since its inception in 2002. In addition, the Tommy Fund is also providing funds for a collaborative program with the Yale Child Study Center to address the mental health and educational needs of children with cancer.

The pediatric hematology/oncology section also includes a brain tumor program and will soon have a bone marrow transplant program. A multidisciplinary team cares for children with all forms of childhood cancer including leukemia, lymphoma, brain tumors and solid tumors such as Wilms' tumor of the kidney, bone tumors and neuroblastoma. All team members are also active members of the Children's Oncology Group (COG), an international organization dedicated to curing childhood cancer by providing national and international clinical trials for these rare diseases.

Childhood cancer patients followed by Yale physicians and seen in either the Yale-New Haven clinic

or in the Yale Guilford clinic are regularly offered enrollment onto COG-initiated clinical trials. According to Joseph McNamara, MD, attending pediatric oncologist at Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital, "This union will allow children from all over Connecticut easier access to other pediatric specialists and clinical trials. Being enrolled in clinical trials has been shown to increase survival in childhood cancer. Our main goal is to cure every child diagnosed with cancer."

Dr. Kupfer, who serves on the Tommy Fund board, said "A big element of what we want to achieve – building a research program, providing comprehensive care for patients and funding clinical and research programs – requires a vibrant and active fundraising effort. Because of the Tommy Fund, we are able to fill a critical void in pediatric cancer care in southern New England and beyond." ❁

Family Day ▶

This year's Tommy Fund Family Day had the highest number of registered walkers and runners to date. More than 680 participants – some pushing baby strollers – navigated their way through the beautiful neighborhood of Westville to honor the children undergoing treatment for cancer and remembering those who have died. On hand to commence the 2008 Family Day 5K road race and two-mile walk (l-r) were: Erica Schwartz, child life coordinator, Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital; Deb Greenberger; Mirza Yanes; Rob Greenberger; Tom Brunnock, Tommy Fund president; and



Michelle D'Amore, executive director, Tommy Fund. Yanes and Robbie Greenberger, 21, who passed in August, collaborated during their cancer treatment to create the design of the 2008 Tommy Fund Family Day t-shirt.



▲ East Lyme community takes to the stage for the Tommy Fund

A group of teachers, spouses, parents, musicians, artists, students and administrators from the East Lyme Public School system and the Flanders Community Theater showcased their talents last summer during a benefit performance of "Working," a Broadway musical adapted by Stephen Schwartz. The community group has taken to the stage for two years to raise more than \$25,000 for Kids Cancer-Vive, a local chapter of the Tommy Fund that provides direct funding to families in southeastern Connecticut undergoing childhood cancer treatment.



▼ "Uncork a Cure"

The second annual "Uncork a Cure" fundraiser coordinated by Beth and Joe Bowman raised more than \$21,000 for Tommy Fund programs. Headlining the evening were Amy Russell, a pediatric social worker at the Yale Hematology/Oncology Clinic in Guilford, and her husband, Ted. The Russells, whose daughter, Melanie, was diagnosed with cancer in 2001, talked about their experience of fighting childhood cancer and the importance of giving back. Today Melanie Russell is a vibrant 11-year-old student at Stratford Academy in Stratford. Special thanks to Cheshire Package Store for coordinating the various wine distributors that participated in this popular event.