



The Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation – Providing Emergency Assistance to Families in Crisis

By Patricia Nolan

When parents are told that their child has cancer, the emotional devastation is profound and many times paralyzing. They struggle to cope minute by minute with the terror of what their child has to face. This sadness and fear for most is simply unimaginable. But what happens to the running of the household while the child is fighting for his or her life? Sandra Muvdi, founder of the Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation (JJCCF), knows all too well. "Many times a parent has to become a full time caregiver while their child is in treatment, sometimes in a single parent household," said Muvdi. "You're trying to survive and help your child survive, and people don't realize that it's a severe financial crisis as well as a medical and emotional crisis. The children can't go to school and parents can't go to work. It is on average a two- year period that a parent has to leave a job."



After suffering the devastating loss of her 7-year old daughter Jessica June to cancer in 2003, Sandra focused her grief on helping others deal with this life shattering event. She started the Foundation in 2004 and quickly saw the void of emergency financial assistance for families coping with a child in treatment for cancer, unable to make ends meet. "There are a lot of non-profits in the area, but they deal with more long- term aid," said Muvdi. The families that Muvdi advocates for are facing eviction, don't have gas or food money, or are at risk of losing their health insurance. Their child may need to get to the hospital for chemotherapy, and the family car has been repossessed. The needs are critical and they are immediate.



Her initial vision for JJCCF was to cover the Chris Evert Children's Hospital at Broward Health Medical Center where JJCCF is headquartered in Fort Lauderdale. After developing a relationship with Broward Health, the next goal was all of the tri-county (Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach) area hospitals treating childhood cancer. This too has been achieved, and with only a staff of two. "Now it's the State of Florida," said Muvdi. "I want any child in any hospital in Florida to be eligible for our assistance if they qualify." The Foundation already has a relationship with a hospital in St. Petersburg. In addition, Florida residents who are being treated at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, TN can get assistance from JJCCF while receiving treatment. All of these relationships begin with the hospital social workers, and it is through these channels that the Foundation receives its referrals.

JJCCF partners with other organizations including the Children's Aid Club, Sun Sentinel Children's Fund and many other local businesses and charities. "Last year, El Dorado Furniture offered a \$5,000 shopping spree to two qualified JJCCF families," said Muvdi. "It was amazing for the two families chosen. We are also excited about our new relationship with SIDES. This year we've assisted four families that have Ewing's Sarcoma. They [SIDES] have sponsored one of the families. It's providing more help for the families that we help through collaboration." These partnerships along with corporate sponsorships, grants and private donations, keep JJCCF running and allow them to continue to ease the financial burden of so many desperate families and help them with the most basic but essential human needs.

Another critical component of the running of JJCCF are the volunteers who give of their time to one of the Foundation's fundraising events, help with administrative tasks or go on family visits. Sandra keeps a database of volunteers and offers training to those who are interested in delivering the funds and supplies to the families in need. "There is a certain type of volunteering that is not for everyone," said Muvdi. "It's very rewarding but not everyone can do it, we provide training and we have to feel if the person is a good fit. We currently have six people trained who go on family visits." JJCCF is grateful for all of the volunteers and is always seeking more people to join their volunteer database and perhaps donate not only their time, but perhaps a particular skill.

JJCCF's main fundraiser is a social event called the Fancy Jeans Party. This year, the 5th Annual Fancy Jeans Party was held at Passion Nightclub at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino and attended by more than 700 people. The concept started as a raffle, has been in various locations and is growing yearly. This is a huge event for a Foundation the size of JJCCF.

They are also involved with the Fort Lauderdale Bus Loop each year. The next bus loop takes

place this Saturday, August 24 and all proceeds benefit the Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation as well as other local charities.

Sandra Muvdi has taken a harrowing event in her own life and re-focused on helping those most in need in her daughter's name. The Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation works hard each day to make the lives of families whose children are struggling to survive a diagnosis of cancer, just a little bit easier. It is a passion for her mission that gets Sandra Muvdi through the challenges her organization faces. "The most important thing is passion. If you don't have it, you won't succeed."

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