



TOMMY STRONG FOUNDATION

By Lauren DePaul Schreiber | Photos by Kat Yannalfo, Photography by SKY
Fundraising photos provided by FitzPatrick Family

With heavy hearts, all of Ramsey remembers when six-year-old Tommy FitzPatrick lost his battle with brain cancer in February 2019. After being diagnosed in February 2017, Tommy endured a very long and brutal battle with cancer. He showed great strength and resiliency and fought it very bravely for two years.

Inspired by Tommy's commitment to never giving up, his family—parents Andrew and Christine, his brother Jack and his sister Sophie—founded the Tommy Strong Foundation in his honor in May 2019. They have mobilized their resources to raise money for pediatric cancer research and assist families affected by pediatric cancer through the Tommy Strong Foundation and in collaboration with Tackle Kids Cancer; Children's Brain Tumor Network; and Pacific Pediatric Neuro-Oncology Consortium among other pediatric cancer programs.

"While Tommy was alive and fighting his battle with cancer, he inspired so many people, not only with his superhero strength but with his compassion for others. The support for Tommy from our friends, family and community during this time was really incredible. The Tommy Strong Foundation continues Tommy's legacy and hopefully will continue to inspire many more people who never got to meet Tommy or know what an amazing kid he always was. Tommy would want us to continue to support all the people who are battling cancer, from the doctors and nurses who cared so much for him, to all the kids like him who never give up the fight to regain their normal lives and be kids again. They need our help," says Christine.

The Tommy Strong Foundation's mission is two-fold: to support the medical community who have dedicated their life's work to finding a cure and better treatments for pediatric cancers; and to support the children and families as they navigate through a cancer diagnosis, treatment and everyday life.

In their inaugural year, with the help of many donors, the Tommy Strong Foundation was able to award more than \$50,000 in grants, providing clinical and research support, as well as patient and family support.

Tommy Strong awarded a \$15,000 grant to the new Pediatric Neuro-Oncology Lab at Hackensack Meridian Health Center for Discovery and Innovation. The lab will focus its efforts on pediatric central nervous system (CNS) tumors.

\$15,000 was granted to the Ependymoma Working Group through the Children's Brain Tumor Network and Pacific Pediatric Neuro-oncology Consortium. The Working Group is comprised of leading medical research institutions from around the world who are collaborating to advance pre-clinical studies and develop clinical trials for ependymoma, the third most common form of brain cancer in children and the most common form of pediatric spinal cord tumor.

A \$10,000 grant was made to Christopher's Haven, located in Boston, MA with a mission to operate a supportive community consisting of temporary apartments and a community recreation area for families of children being treated for cancer in nearby hospitals. The grant will cover housing expenses for one apartment for an entire year, allowing 6 - 8 families in need to stay at Christopher's Haven rent free.

A \$15,000 grant was awarded to the Hackensack University Medical Center Foundation to support the development of a Sibling Support Program, managed through the Child Life Department at the Joseph M. Sanzari Children's Hospital. The Program will employ a dedicated Child Life Specialist to work with the siblings of the Hospital's pediatric oncology patients, providing them with emotional support and therapeutic programming, as well as recreational outings.

One of the biggest impacts that the Foundation had was during the height of the ongoing pandemic. Last spring, Covid-19 shut down most of the world, including some support services for pediatric cancer patients. Children were isolated in hospital rooms and caregivers experienced reduced wages, yet cancer treatment had to continue. The Tommy Strong Foundation donated new iPads to pediatric cancer patients so the children could keep in touch with friends and family during isolation. They donated more than \$6000 worth of Visa, grocery store and food delivery service gift cards, meals for pediatric cancer families, and had meals delivered to hospital staff.

"Caring for a child with cancer is difficult to deal with under normal circumstances. With the Covid-19 pandemic affecting people's ability to work, it was important to us that parents



Family and friends work together to benefit the Tommy Strong Foundation

Sophie delivered meals to the hospital, Jack donated Lego sets for his birthday in honor of his Lego loving little brother, and Sophie & friends raised money for Childhood Cancer Awareness Month in honor of Tommy Strong Foundation by selling hand sanitizer, masks, toilet paper, bracelets and kindness coupons.

were able to focus on getting their child through treatment rather than worrying about putting food on the table. And the thought of these poor kids being in isolation was heart-breaking. When Tommy was sick, there were periods when he was in the hospital for three or four weeks at a time. It was hard for him to be separated from his brother and sister, but when they would come and visit him it always brightened his day and put a smile on his face. The iPads were a way for the kids to stay visually and socially connected to their loved ones even if they couldn't be in the same room," says Christine.

Andrew and Christine hope to raise awareness about pediatric cancer, a general term used to describe more than 12 types (and countless subtypes) of cancer. Pediatric cancer is the leading cause of death by disease in children, affecting 43 new children each day in the US alone, yet only 4% of the National Cancer Research budget is allocated to pediatric cancer research. Each type/subtype of pediatric cancer requires a specialized course of treatment, making it difficult to find cures and stressing the need for further research. Globally there are more than 300,000 children diagnosed with cancer each year. Since 1980, fewer than 10 drugs have been developed for use in children with cancer, as compared with the hundreds of drugs that have been created exclusively for adults. Lastly, more than 95% of childhood cancer survivors have significant health-related issues because of current cancer treatment options.

"Raising awareness about childhood cancer is incredibly important to further funding for the critical research needed to fight this group of diseases. The statistics surrounding childhood cancer are sobering, and so many children's lives are liter-

Below: The Fitzpatrick Family stand by the tree they planted in honor of Tommy. Left: They always hold Tommy's favorite stuffed animal (Dougie) close.



CHARITY SPOTLIGHT

CHARITY SPOTLIGHT

ally at stake. Childhood cancer researchers rely on private funding, like the Tommy Strong Foundation, to fill in the huge gap that government funding has left. Simply put, our children are worth more than 4 percent,” says Andrew.

After a successful first year, the Tommy Strong Foundation looks to the future of fighting forward in a way that honors the incredible legacy of Tommy himself. “We’re pleased with what we’ve been able to accomplish in our first year, and we’re so grateful for everyone who has supported Tommy Strong. We think Tommy would be proud of what we’ve done so far together. There’s still a lot more to do and we’re inspired by the children fighting a life-threatening disease they don’t deserve and by the work of the brilliant doctors and researchers who are dedicating their lives to finding cures.

We’re going to give our all to support them, and we endeavor to expand our support community, team up with other foundations and corporations and hopefully fund some very meaningful work in the years ahead. Our dream is to one day live in world where kids don’t have to worry about getting cancer...where kids can just be kids,” says Andrew.

To learn more about the Tommy Strong Foundation, and learn more about getting involved visit www.tommystrong.org

SAVE THE DATES!

Dec. 8th and 17th: Shop at any of the Tons of Toys locations (Wyckoff, Madison and Westwood) and Tons of Treasures in Wyckoff on these dates and 15% of your purchase will be donated to the Tommy Strong Foundation. Please tell the cashier at checkout that you are there for the Tommy Strong Fundraiser and the Foundation will get credit for the sale.

Dec. 1st - 15th: Tommy Strong Foundation is collecting new, unwrapped toys and games for pediatric cancer patients at Joseph M. Sanzari Children’s Hospital (Hackensack, NJ) and The Children’s Hospital at Montefiore (Bronx, NY). Toys for all ages are needed (infant - 18 years old). For the protection of the patients, all donated items must be in new, original packaging. Drop-off collection boxes will be located at Mary A. Hubbard School, LEAP Preschool in Ramsey and the Ramsey Farmer’s Market. You can also shop the Amazon Wish List at bit.ly/TommyStrong_wishlist.

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