

Keeping Grace's legacy alive

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GRAFTON - Grace Bowen's memory is being kept alive through the efforts of the many people who gave her strength.

Grace captured the hearts of communities in Northumberland County and beyond during her battle with cancer that was diagnosed in early 2014.

The Grade 4 student at Grafton Public School loved dancing, figure skating, soccer and swimming. But most of all, Grace loved hockey.

Grace had countless chemotherapy treatments during her battle with osteosarcoma.

In July 2014 she had surgery to remove the tumour, which resulted in the amputation of part of her leg. Her ankle was then reattached to create a new knee in preparation for a prosthetic limb.

The popular nine-year-old played for the West Northumberland Wild girls hockey team before she was stricken with the disease that would take her life on March 13, 2015.

In her short battle, Grace captured the hearts of thousands of people, from celebrities to athletes including National Hockey League players.

Since Grace's death her parents, Greg and Andrea, and sister MacKenzie have wanted to find a way to create a legacy to keep Grace's memory alive.

"We pondered for a long time what to do with the money the communities, both locally and internationally, raised for Grace in her honour," said Andrea.

"One of the things we have done is create a tribute fund at Sick Kids to give back to the hospital."

During the summer, the Bowens met with Lisa Charendoff, manager of the Ambassador Program at Sick Children's Hospital, and Colin Hennigar, director, Major Gifts at Sick Children's Hospital, at their home in Grafton.

"The first meeting we just did some brainstorming of what could be done to honour Grace," Andrea said.

Charendoff and Hennigar began working together a detailed proposal in the coming weeks which included several ideas.

"One of the items that really intrigued us was a project led by Dr. Sevan Hopyan who also happens to be the amazing orthopedic surgeon who did Grace's amputation - rotationplasty - to remove her tumour," Andrea said.

Learning about the disease, she found that osteosarcoma is a rare cancer that is severely underfunded.

"So helping out with this research definitely piqued our in-



PETE FISHER / NORTHUMBERLAND TODAY FILE PHOTO

Nine-year-old Grace Bowen was greeted by friends and teammates when she attended the Oct. 13, 2014 Cobourg Cougars game.

terest," Andrea said.

The research looks at the behaviour of embryonic cells and how it relates to sarcoma cells.

Sarcoma cells spread by leaving the main tumour in small groups that contain few cells. These cells co-ordinate their behaviour such that they crawl away from the main tumour and enter small veins that transport them to lungs.

"By applying what we know about embryonic cells, we can understand how sarcoma cells co-ordinate their movement to distant sites and abort that process," Andrea said.

"It sounds easy enough in today's day and age, but years and years of research are still needed."

Funding research is a top priority for the Bowen family, but they also want to help the children at the hospital.

Child Life Programs focus on the social and emotional impact of illness and hospitalization.

The child life specialists use play as a tool for socialization, preparation, expression of feelings normalization and learning.

"I can't say enough how grateful we are for this program," Andrea said.

Grace had many child life specialists she was fond of and who helped her with many things - from preparing to get a feeding tube through her nose to her stomach, to distracting her during stressful times, playing with her, visiting, holding special art days or providing distractions in waiting rooms for surgeries.

"Contributing to this program also intrigued us and we know Grace would want to be a part of it," Andrea said.

The Bowens made the trip to Sick Children's Hospital to review a proposal and go over specifics. The next step was to set up a meeting with Hopyan to talk about his research.

On Oct. 27 the Bowens met with Hopyan, Grace's orthopedic surgeon and a senior scientist in development and stem cell biology.

"We were in awe of his research," Andrea said.

After a tour of his lab in the Peter Gilgan Centre for Research and Learning the Bowens presented a cheque for \$40,000 on behalf of their family, friends and communities who helped raise money in memory of Grace.

"We know these funds will have a tremendous impact in advancing Dr. Hopyan's research to move us closer to understanding this horrible disease," Andrea said.

"Grace inspired so many adults in her short life, but she also inspired children and she always wanted to help.

"She had such deep concern for other children and what they were going through at Sick Kids."

The family made an additional donation of \$5,000 on behalf of

their family, friends, communities in memory of Grace to the Child Life Department at Sick Kids to help them purchase iPads and to assist in funding a program which connects pediatric cancer patients across Canada on a safe and supportive platform.

Some of the money raised throughout last year is also being used to help other families going through similar situations, Andrea said.

"We are so thankful and grateful to all those that continue to support us during this time," she said. "We want to thank everyone who made donations on behalf of Grace at her funeral."

The Bowens said they will ensure Grace's memory is kept alive in many ways.

"One way being is to continue to support the world-class research at Sick Children's Hospital." pete.fisher@sunmedia.ca twitter.com/NT_pfisher