

Summerfest offers hope to children living with cancer

BY DAWN LIERSCH
Staff Writer

Like many proud mothers, Corinna Jones sat on the sidelines crying with joy when her 11-year-old son Jimmy scored a hat trick during a recent rollerblade hockey game.

But the endeavour had even more momentum considering Jimmy often could not even get out of bed last summer.

Jimmy has been suffering from headaches, nausea and seizures that cause temporary paralysis for the past three years since being treated for a benign brain tumour.

Although Jimmy has had surgery to remove the tumour, he still has to take medication to control side effects from the surgery and from other small bleeding tumours that are inoperable.

"He missed out on a lot of childhood events," said Jones, a Newmarket resident.

"Now he plays hard. He may have to come in early, but he's playing and that's terrific. But Jimmy still has complications — we've been fighting for three years to be where we are today."

It's a fight many people face, as the occurrence of brain tumours continues to increase.

In fact, with 60 to 100 brain tumours diagnosed at the Hospital for Sick Children each year, it is the most common malignancy in children next to leukemia.

Jones said Jimmy will take medication for the rest of his life and be monitored closely with frequent CAT scans and MRI scans to ensure the tumour doesn't recur.

But she's just grateful he's alive after seeing first-hand there are plenty of children who don't survive.

As a member of Brainchild, a volunteer organization that raises money for brain tumour research and education and acts as a support group for parents who have children with brain tumours, Jones has seen the disease claim many lives.

She recalls the turmoil faced by another Newmarket woman who recently lost her two-year-old daughter to brain cancer.

"At one point, (the child) had lost her sight. These tumours affect everything — it makes them unable to eat, unable to see. They spend their last days not knowing their families," she said.

"It's what you see with these children, even if they survive their tumours, that's really heartbreaking. I used to think we were lucky (because Jimmy survived), but then someone reminded me that none of the children with brain tumours are lucky."

The group has hope an upcoming fundraiser to raise money for research will help lead to a cure.

Brainchild is organizing its sixth annual Summerfest Aug. 12 from noon to 8 p.m.

at the Markham Fairgrounds (McCowan Road, one block north of Elgin Mills Road) featuring helicopter rides, jumping castles, games, a corn roast and artists from the Millennium Tribute Tour performing songs from the Backstreet Boys, the Spice Girls, Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera and Ricky Martin.

Live bands, a car show and a silent auction are also part of the festivities.

Last year, the event drew 6,000 people and raised \$50,000.

"It's a good way for people to come together and connect. Many of them are there for the same reason. It's a sad reason, but it has a purpose," said Debbie Barnett, one of the Summerfest organizers who lost her niece, Amy Beacock, to brain cancer seven years ago.

"A lot of people just come because it's a fun day. Instead of all the grief around Brainchild, this is a fun day."

Admission is \$5, but York Region schools will be mailing out free passes with students' report cards and free passes will also be included in McDonald's Happy Meals during the last week of July.

When Angela Dacey, the owner of the Heaven & Earth gift shop in Newmarket, heard about the fundraiser, she believed she had a fitting donation for the silent auction.

Dacey has donated an autographed photo by Darlene Lamb entitled *The Gift*, which features a cloud that looks like an angel carrying something up to heaven.

Lamb, a Guelph-based photographer, had just lost her 5-1/2-month-old grandson, Adam, to sudden infant death syndrome when she saw the unique cloud formation while in Parry Sound in 1994.

Lamb said she thought it looked like an angel carrying a gift, possibly an infant, up to heaven and believed it was a personal message for her family.

It has since been inspirational to others who have lost loved ones and has been a popular seller.

"At the time I took it, I didn't realize what it was all about," Lamb said during an autograph session at Heaven & Earth late last month.

"Now I recognize how important and awesome it is. Now I recognize we all have a purpose and my purpose was to take that photograph."

Dacey donates a copy of the photograph to support a worthy cause each year. Last year, it was donated to the transplant unit of Toronto General Hospital after Dacey learned a customer had just received a life-saving liver transplant.

For more information about Brainchild, call (416) 813-7974. For details on Summerfest, call 475-7006.



Photographer Darlene Lamb with Brainchild co-ordinator Debbie Barnett.

WARNING SIGNS

Early detection is important for the successful treatment of brain tumours. Brainchild offers some symptoms that could be early warning signs of tumours in children:

- Headache.
- Double vision and visual disturbances.
- Morning nausea and vomiting.
- Weakness or paralysis in any part of the body.
- Personality changes.
- Hearing disturbances.

According to Brainchild, there is a five to 10 per cent increase in pediatric brain tumours each year. After leukemia, brain tumors are the most common malignancy in children.

Families and friends of children with brain tumours are invited to support group meetings at the Hospital for Sick Children, 555 University Ave., Toronto.

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