

COMPANIONSHIP IN CANCER

Keaton Raphael Memorial aids children and families alike

BY JENNIFER VON GELDERN

Worldwide, a child is diagnosed with cancer every three minutes. One in five diagnosed in the U.S. will not survive, and in America more children die of childhood cancer than any other disease. That's why Keaton Raphael Memorial (KRM) has become an invaluable resource in Northern California, aiding thousands of children with cancer and their families with emotional, educational and financial support while increasing awareness and funding research toward a cure.

"Childhood cancer targets the entire family, and KRM does too," says CEO Teresa Hofhenke. "When a child is diagnosed with cancer, it turns the entire family's world upside down, and

often parents have no idea who to turn to for help. In bringing

our mission of hope, strength and healing to these families, growing great community partners helps us provide the resources they need to stay afloat financially and emotionally during this trying time."

The Kelly family of Shingle Springs is battling cancer. Their son Mason, now 3-and-a-half years old, was

diagnosed with neuroblastoma in October 2013, just after his second birthday. A fall from his bike triggered bleeding from a massive, aggressive tumor that was invading his internal organs.

"When I saw unusually large bruising from his fall, we took him to the pediatrician, who immediately referred him to the ER," says his mother, Thi. Tests confirmed cancer,

already stage four. Mason was hospitalized in intensive care for seven months, undergoing radiation and chemotherapy treatments, surgeries to remove the tumor and treat complications, and a stem cell transplant from his own bone marrow.

"While Mason was hospitalized, we were introduced to KRM," Thi says. "It was such a blessing, because we were heartbroken and stretched to our limits. Jessica Alonso, our KRM ambassador, supported us, saw to our needs, connected us with resources and even provided tokens of entertainment for Mason and relief for us. KRM even helped us through the holiday season. We were inpatient for two years, so our lives were drastically affected."

A child's cancer is traumatic for siblings, too. "We have seven kids, each with needs and schedules," Thi says. Mason's six siblings range in age from one to 17 (Thi delivered the youngest while Mason was hospitalized), and KRM offered them support, too.

"KRM creates fun events to give kids the opportunity to be kids — not just the patient, but all the siblings," Thi says. "They are always thinking of the whole family." In addition, KRM awarded its John McLean Hero Award, a scholarship grant, to Mason's 17-year-old sister, Alanna, for her essay about her experience as a sibling in the fight against cancer.

"It's hard to connect with other families in a medical setting, but through KRM activities for parents and siblings, we found other people experiencing what we were experiencing and felt a sense of understanding and community," Thi says. The Kellys have participated in most KRM family events, including its adopt-a-family program, and has used many KRM services, like financial planning and peer-to-peer mother's night out.

Remission for Mason was achieved in March of this year. However, the battle continues. His father, Brian, was diagnosed with acute leukemia last August and was hospitalized for six weeks while Mason was undergoing chemotherapy.

As the Kelly family continues to combat cancer, KRM stands by them, ready to lend loving support and as much aid as possible.



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