

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



Teddy Bear foundation seeks to raise awareness about pediatric cancer

By ADAM SYLVAIN News-Press Correspondent
September 11, 2013 5:45 AM

Sophia Andrade was 2 years old when she was diagnosed with a rare form of pediatric cancer.

After 18 months of treatment, Sophia was declared cancer-free in January, a few months before her fourth birthday.

Sophia's mother, Dr. Sandra Andrade, said the experience of dealing with her daughter's fight with neuroblastoma would have been much more difficult for her family if not for the help of the Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation.

"When Sophia was diagnosed, I had to step away from work and my husband was a full-time student," Dr. Andrade said. "(TBCF) paid for parking so we could get to all of her appointments. They also provided us with gas cards and extra gift cards for meals."



Jim Andrade and his wife Sandra Andrade credit the Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation for helping them through their daughter Sophia's battle with cancer.

The local nonprofit provides support to families of children with cancer living in Santa Barbara, Ventura, and San Luis Obispo counties.

At a press conference Tuesday, TBCF launched their inaugural Gold Ribbon Campaign, a \$200,000 fundraising and awareness push the organization hopes will enable them to assist more families like the Andrades.

The eight-week campaign, beginning during National Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, runs through Oct. 31.

Lindsey Guerrero, executive director of TBCF, said out-of-pocket costs for families affected by pediatric cancer average \$10,000 each year.

Affecting 36 children and their families daily in the United States and 160,000 families worldwide, Ms. Guerrero said childhood cancer is not a rare or far-off problem, but doesn't get the same attention as other forms of cancer.

"We see pink ribbons, but what about gold ribbons?" Ms. Guerrero asked the crowd. "My goal is to have the gold ribbon as recognized as the pink ribbon someday."

In addition to providing financial support, Dr. Andrade said TBCF was also there for the family emotionally, connecting them with support groups and recreating for Sophia a real-life North Pole experience from her favorite movie, "The Polar Express."

Jim Bechtel, chair of the board of directors for TBCF, said cancer within his family led him to the organization.

“I have two daughters and both of them were diagnosed with cancer twice,” Mr. Bechtel said. “It’s a profoundly life-changing event and part of my therapy is to help other people going through a similar journey.”

Also attending the campaign launch were several eighth-grade students from Crane Country Day School in Santa Barbara.

In February, then seventh-grade students Grace Johnson, Isabel Gonzalez, Shelagh Morphy, and Arin Pieramici organized a “Care Fair” fundraiser to benefit seven local charities and nonprofits, including TBCF.

Janey Cohen, who coordinates the school’s Service Learning Class, said the school has an ongoing relationship with the nonprofit.

“Our school has a really close connection with TBCF, because it’s personal,” said Ms. Cohen who mentioned another student in the group attending the event, Brenda Rodriguez, is the older sister of Briana, who was diagnosed with cancer and received support from TBCF.

Brenda, now a student at Carpinteria High School, helped spearhead support for TBCF while she attended Crane Country Day School. In the past, the school has created activity books for children receiving chemotherapy treatment, and held diaper drives for families.

Like Sophia, Brenda’s sister Briana is now cancer free.

As Dr. Andrade addressed those attending the press conference Tuesday, she held a long string of beads in her hand, all different colors and sizes. They belong to her daughter.

“Each bead represents a procedure, an overnight stay or blood treatment,” said Dr. Andrade, who added a bead after each milestone moment in Sophia’s battle with cancer as a physical sign of hope for the family. “There are over 1,000 beads.”

To donate to TBCF’s Gold Ribbon Campaign, text the word “Teddy” to 51400, visit www.teddybearcancerfoundation.org, or mail a donation to Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation, 2320 Bath St., Suite 107, Santa Barbara, CA, 93105.

email: asylvain@newspress.com



Bryan Kerner, the TBCF development director, interviews 4-year-old cancer survivor Sophia Andrade during the foundation’s Gold Ribbon event on Tuesday.

STEVE MALONE / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS