

TOMMY STRONG: 2022 YEAR IN REVIEW

Contributed by Christine and Andrew FitzPatrick

The Tommy Strong Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, started in honor of our youngest son, Tommy, who passed away at age 6 after fighting brain cancer for two years. The Tommy Strong Foundation supports the childhood cancer community by funding groundbreaking research, advocating for the cause, educating and raising awareness about childhood cancer, and funding patient and family support and resource programs. We are 100% volunteer run, so all of our proceeds go toward funding the programs we support.

This past year was our third year of operations and we continue to get more involved with the global childhood cancer community. In April and May, we participated in U.S. Congressional meetings alongside the National Brain Tumor Society and the American Childhood Cancer Association to advocate for children with cancer. We regularly meet with pediatric oncologists and medical researchers and by learning more about the latest developments in childhood cancer research we are able to direct our grants to some of the most promising pediatric cancer projects happening today.

Although we are a local foundation, we recognize the needs of the childhood cancer community spread far beyond Bergen County, NJ. Our annual holiday toy drive benefits children's hospitals in Hackensack, New York and Boston and we've provided grants to hospitals and institutions in Seattle, Portland (Ore.), Hackensack, Boston and Philadelphia.

Recipients of Tommy Strong grants this year include:

- **Tommy's Place**, a dream vacation home for children fighting cancer, located in Cape Cod, MA. The children can stay for a week with extended family and friends to relax, have fun and make memories. Tommy's Place is the only escape from months of treatment and hospital stays that many of these children will ever get. Our grant funded private, week-long vacations for five deserving families at this magical place, free of charge.
- **"Project Accelerate,"** a groundbreaking program within the Children's Brain Tumor Network (CBTN) that aims to gather data from and molecularly characterize every child enrolled in CBTN (more than 4200 children). This will significantly increase the size and scale of information available to researchers, scientists, and healthcare



providers worldwide without embargo and help advance precision medicine for children with brain tumors, ensuring that doctors and clinicians can deliver the right diagnosis and determine the best treatment for each child.

- **The Vitanza Lab at Seattle Children's Hospital and Research Institute.** This grant supports Dr. Nicolas Vitanza's groundbreaking immunotherapy CAR T cell trials for pediatric brain and central nervous system tumors. CAR T cell therapy has been a promising treatment for some of the most challenging childhood leukemia and lymphoma cases. Dr. Vitanza's lab is doing invaluable work to try to translate this treatment to childhood brain cancers, which generally have very low cure rates.

We are equally proud of the impact that Tommy and the Tommy Strong Foundation have had on the local community. Tommy's classmates, who are now in 4th grade, held their 2nd Annual Tommy Strong Baseball game this past spring and more than doubled what they raised the year prior. This year the players were able to meet Tommy's oncologist, Dr. Derek Hanson, to learn how the money they raised would be helping children with cancer.

Ramsey schools, Girl Scout troops, and many of the athletic teams in town have held fundraisers and helped with toy and book drives. We are lucky to be supported by this wonderful community and it is incredibly heart-warming every time a child, young adult or parent reaches out with an



idea for helping us raise funds and awareness for childhood cancer. Not only does this support help advance the Tommy Strong mission, but it keeps Tommy's light shining brightly in our community and beyond it. We are so grateful for that.

What we're looking to do in Future

As we enter 2023, we endeavor to expand the Foundation's reach; continue to educate and raise awareness about the realities of childhood cancer and the need for research funding; and search for the most promising childhood cancer research projects to support.

We developed a "Strong Box" care package program this year to reach individual children going through treatment and we're looking forward to formally launching this effort in 2023. Another priority for 2023 is to raise awareness in our state. Through our advocacy this past year we learned that New Jersey has the 3rd highest childhood cancer incidence rate in the nation, and we plan to form an action team to engage with local municipalities to declare September Childhood Cancer Awareness month.

It is wonderful to see how much the Tommy Strong Foundation has accomplished in the last three years with the help of our community. We are proud to work alongside you to honor Tommy and continue the fight against childhood cancer until our efforts are no longer needed.

TOMMY'S BIRTHDAY FUNDRAISING APPEAL

In honor of Tommy's birthday, we will hold our annual fundraising appeal starting on "Giving Tuesday" (Nov. 29) and running through the month of December. The money raised will directly fund our various programs and grants for next year. If you are inspired to support our cause please visit tommystrong.org to find out how you can help make a difference.

HOLIDAY TOY DRIVE
November 28 - Dec 11th, 2022
This holiday season Tommy Strong will be collecting new, unwrapped toys for childhood cancer patients at local children's hospitals. More info and a link to our Amazon wishlist can be found at tommystrong.org/events.



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