

Written by Joanna Brathwaite

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The Purple Society is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization focused on changing the prognosis of pediatric cancers, while educating and connecting families of childhood cancer patients worldwide. Anthony Conti, co-founder, shared with us the heartwarming history of The Purple Society and how its outreach has grown.

AFM: How did the Purple Society begin?

AC: My daughter, Nitalia Conti, was diagnosed at the age of 12 with a cancerous brain tumor. During her many long stays in the hospital, she saw firsthand the many children without any resources. Many of the families left to fight all alone. Families were being neglected due to insurance and financial issues, and many people were left distraught with no concise answers from doctors. "We need to figure out how to get resources for every family," she said to me. Thus began The Purple Society. We started going room to room to visit families and provide love, support, and resources. Since then, we have helped thousands of kids across the country and worldwide fight this horrendous disease.

AFM: What kind of resources do you provide for families of childhood cancer patients?

AC: Our organization is very research oriented. Childhood cancer receives the least amount of research funding of all cancers. We stay abreast of clinical trials, new treatment techniques, and the most cutting-edge treatment centers across the world. Educating families on clinical trials and advances in treatment options are a few of the very valuable services we offer. Everything we do is always 100 percent free to the families. Our Web site, www.werpurple.org, also has a plethora of web tools to help families make educated decisions about the options for their child. Since many regional hospitals are not equipped with extensive care resources, we also try to facilitate getting children to hospitals where they can receive the best care and outcome. We understand that a little goes a long way and although we are a small organization, we do try to help the families financially with everyday expenses as well.

AFM: Can you explain more about the Purple Power Rover?

AC: My wife and I bought a Land Rover for our family vehicle years before Nitalia was ever diagnosed. Nitalia loved the truck and would always say that she wanted it to be her's when she got her license. Nitalia earned her angel wings before getting her driver's license, and her truck just sat in storage waiting for the opportunity to represent her dream. When the foundation started spreading across the country, we decided to use the truck in a way that would honor Nitalia's memory. We wrapped it with The Purple Society logo and pictures of Nitalia and began using the car for events and hospital visits. Chances are you will see The Purple Power Rover delivering "Nitalia's Purple Goodies" to oncology units across the valley. Partnering with local businesses, we deliver food and drinks to families who are in the hospital and can't afford to eat away from home. The Purple Power Rover helps us to accomplish that as well as many of our other programs.

AFM: How has the Purple Society affected the Valley?

AC: The Purple Society is the first childhood cancer foundation in the Valley that not only educates Arizona families, but also those fighting childhood cancer worldwide. The organization was founded by a 12-year-old hometown girl with a lot of love and passion for other children fighting the same battle. Childhood cancer families need support. They need to know that someone understands what they are going through; someone that has walked in their shoes and knows how to navigate the frightening world of childhood cancer. We try to help every

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child in the Valley that has been diagnosed by attending doctor visits and chemo sessions. Parents aren't always sure what to do and we help them understand their options.

AFM: How can the community get involved with Purple Society?

AC: Our annually walk, "Walk 4 Purple," happens in September which is Childhood Cancer Awareness month. We use the walk to raise funds and spread awareness. Last year three states held the "Walk 4 Purple," and we hope to expand that to four states this year. With more than 50 local volunteers, all of whom are involved in our various programs, we are able to keep Nitalia's dream alive and help so many families. We are always welcoming more volunteers to the Purple Family. They just need to have a passion for saving children and changing lives...Remember, Nitalia always said: One Person CAN Make A Difference!