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Wednesday, 17 January 2018 15:42 -



After her son received a devastating diagnosis at the age of 5, Patti Luttrell and her family started a nonprofit to aid others who were facing the same difficult situation.



Patti Luttrell's son, Jeff, was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia at the age of 5. In the years to follow, Jeff's cancer would return several times, requiring multiple rounds of chemotherapy radiation and a bone marrow transplant. At the age of 29, Jeff is a 25-year cancer survivor who has been cancer-free for one year.

Patti says she was very lucky because her family received a lot of support, good insurance and resources to help her son through his journey. When Patti's daughter, Jenny, was visiting her brother in the hospital during his bone marrow transplant, she learned that a young girl in the next room had died, and her family didn't have enough gas money to make it home after suffering such a heartbreaking loss. Jenny had been shielded from the financial burden due to cancer, Patti says, so this came as a shock to her that a family would not have basic needs at such a time of distress. Shortly after the girl's death, Jenny turned to her mom and said, "We are going to make a difference. We need to make sure families get what they need."

Two years later, the family started [Children's Cancer Network](#) (the seed money from its first event came from a \$2,000 garage sale). The nonprofit is dedicated to assisting Arizona families battling childhood cancer as well as providing financial assistance, promoting education, encouraging healthy lifestyles, building self-esteem and creating awareness of the issues they face. Its mission "is for each family to realize they are not alone in the fight against cancer. Giving hope to children and families is [Children's Cancer Network's] goal."

With the help of a dedicated and talented board, the organization is growing and thriving as it strives to support families in need. In fact, the organization has grown to almost \$1 million in annual revenues, with 87 percent of all revenues supporting family-centered programs and services.

Though the nonprofit offers many programs, Luttrell says funding to cover food and gas is consistently cited as a major need for families facing the unexpected diagnosis of cancer. Based on financial needs, Children's Cancer Network also provides beds, wigs, scholarship support programs and education programs. "We help more than 650 families each year," Patti says. "The financial need to help families has increased over the years and the request for help has increased too, as more and more families get to know our organization. We are pleased to be able to respond to these requests."

One of the organization's biggest annual events, Children's Cancer Network's Run to Fight Children's Cancer, is a 10K run, a 5K walk/run and a one-fourth-mile survivor walk on March 10. Patti encourages families and children to participate at the event as volunteers, runners or supporters. (To learn more, visit runtofightcancer.com.)

In the future, Children's Cancer Network hopes to continue to support even more of Arizona's families. "The more we are able to raise, the more we can do for these wonderful families," Patti says.