



A Profile of the BumbleBee Foundation

By Emilia Hamburg

As a teenage girl, I understand the insecurities many of us deal with, from worrying about leaving our homes each morning without makeup, wearing the perfect outfit, and having our hair done just right. We stress about our grades, the shape of our body, and if our crush likes us back. What we want to do is have fun with our friends, play our sport, or work on our artistic interests. But when cancer takes hold things begin to change. These teens may lose their hair, the shape of their bodies may change, they no longer have the energy to go out, and their bodies cannot handle the physical stresses of a sport. Cancer isolates a teen, often sitting alone and not knowing the person they have become. Insecurities can arise with concerns about what their future holds.

When a teen becomes sick their parents are there standing right behind them acting bravely, but terrified behind closed doors. The moment a child is born their parents have imagined their child's entire life. They can picture the first day of kindergarten, middle school graduation, the first day and graduation day from high school, the day they move to college, their first big job, their wedding, and all the little moments in between. But one thing a parent never imagines is countless nights in hospital rooms, meeting new doctors, watching their baby fight to stay alive. No parent wants their child to ever suffer; however, some parents are faced with being unable to afford their child's treatment or afford those incidental items their child may need to help them feel somewhat normal throughout their treatment.

To assist parents in providing support for their children, many new foundations have surfaced that support teens and their families. One of those foundations is the BumbleBee Foundation. This foundation was created in memory of Jarren Donatini in 2011 who sadly died from Hepatoblastoma at the age of four. His parent's Jason & Heather Donatini, co-founded the BumbleBee Foundation to inspire hope and be a source of love and light for the children and families dealing with pediatric cancer. What makes this foundation so special is that they get it, they went through a difficult time themselves. They were parents of a little boy who lost his life to cancer and were motivated to help the other kids they saw in the pediatric unit. Through the BumbleBee Foundation not only do they offer programs for these kids and their families but they connect with them personally creating relationships that last anywhere from one month to even years after a child's treatment has ended.

The BumbleBee Foundation offers six programs, the most significant of these is the patient aid program which offers financial support to families. The support ranges from a \$5 Starbucks card to rent assistance, memorial assistance, and sometimes even a car all depending on the specific need of each family. The goal is to make things just a bit easier for the family. Through this program they provide counselling support that specifically helps the teens that they support. Two other programs they have are adoption programs, called "Holiday Bees" and "Spring Basket", where the kids with cancer and their siblings give the Foundation a wish list of things they want, then the Foundation's volunteers, the "busyBees", put together a basket for each child and even their parents. The parents get both a Gas card and a Target gift card.

Another program is their “BeeDay Cards”, these are personalized birthday cards for each child that also have a gift card inside. They also have a program called “Kelli’s Wagons” where they provide wagons for families to help carry their personal items from the hospital to home easier. Finally, they have a program called “Beepacks”, a newer program launched in January 2020 that includes items needed for new patients to use during their hospitalization. These “Beepacks” are packed with shampoo, conditioner, notepads, starbucks gift card, hand sanitizer, information packets, and more. The goal is to help make the transition into the hospital a bit easier on the parents.

Each year the BumbleBee Foundation helps 100 new kids making the total number of kids they currently help at 250, one third of those are teenagers. For those teenagers, The BumbleBee Foundation does something special, pairing teens together with others of similar diagnoses so that they can talk to each other, relating in a way neither their friends nor their family can.

During the Coronavirus Pandemic, The BumbleBee Foundation has still been able to host virtual events. These virtual events are allowing both the kids who are at home and in the hospital to participate. They have done things from bingo night to bringing in a DJ. They have also hosted virtual fundraisers like an online auction.

Getting involved with the BumbleBee Foundation is easy. There is a simple survey posted on their website which asks in what capacity you want to be involved. They then find the best position within the foundation that matches your interest. They also perform a simple background check since this foundation revolves around kids. But in the end, they want as many “busyBEEs” as they possibly can get.

Being a teenager is not easy, it is a time of fluctuation between friends, classes, interests, style, and so much more. Things never stay constant, no matter how much we want them to. As much as we do not want to admit it, we rely on our parents to guide us when we are overwhelmed, lost, and lonely. The BumbleBee Foundation not only supports teenagers through this time of complete change and confusion, but it supports their parents. It helps them find answers and provides guidance when they do not have it themselves, so that they can be there for their children.

It is wonderful to know that these foundations exist, manned by such wonderful people who give freely of themselves to children and families in need during such a difficult time as dealing with cancer.