

Donley is One in a Million

Sarah Donley's stay in the hospital made her determined to raise \$1 million to help others.

by Craig Ostroff
Editor

Laying in a hospital bed battling kidney failure in March 2011, her prognosis still unknown, Sarah Donley had only one question on her mind — what could she do to help out the children around her who were suffering?

Sarah had been admitted to the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh when a cold and sinus infection developed into severe headaches and dehydration. The pain medication she had been taking had settled in her kidneys, which soon shut down. The toxins in her blood were dangerously high.

She was in the hospital for nearly two weeks trying to recover from a situation that very well could have been fatal.



Yet her thoughts were on helping those she saw around her ... children who didn't have their parents around for support, or didn't have insurance.

"When I was feeling better, my mom would wheel me around the hallways and I was looking in the rooms, and it made me upset," said Sarah, now 15. "Some kids didn't even have their families there. I wanted to help them. Some don't have health care, some can't afford it."

She decided that she wanted to raise \$1 million to help other children who were in sick and in need.

"When she was laying in bed, of course we had plenty of time to talk," said Sarah's father, John. "One night, her mom went home and it was just me and Sarah and she mentioned that she wanted to raise money. I asked, 'What for?' She said, 'I want to help other kids.' I asked, 'How much?' She said, 'I want to raise a million dollars. Can you help me do that?'"

"Well, I can try."



At top, Sarah Donley is back to full strength and back on the hardwood for Altoona. Above left, Sarah with Dr. Yo, the doctor her father credits with saving her life while she was in the hospital. Above right, Sarah, Lauren, Pam and John Donley at a recent Pittsburgh Steelers game.

Photos courtesy of the Donley family

Something simple, such as a candy sale or collection drive, just wouldn't suffice. A sustained fundraising effort would be needed. After many months of brainstorming, planning and prepping, the Sarah Donley Sharing is Caring Fund was set up with a local community foundation and the website mycharityteam.com went live online.

"The whole idea behind mycharityteam.com is people helping people helping others," John Donley said.

Those who sign up as an affiliate indicate their preferred charity. By purchasing items on the website — such as Restaurant.com gift cards and other money-saving coupon cards — people earn money for both Sarah's fund and their own charity. And the more people they sign up, the more gets raised for their charity.

"It's just like in an affiliate marketing program. It's network marketing meets affiliate marketing meets helping a worthy cause," John Donley said.

Still in the early stages, the Donleys are working on spreading the word of mycharityteam.com and are in the planning stages of a spring fundraising event.

Sarah is now in ninth grade at Altoona Area Junior High School and plays for both the school basketball team and for an AAU traveling team. Despite the mounting time commitments, she's prepared to do her part to reach her goal.

"In the hospital, I realized how great of a life I had, and I realized I could lose it," said Sarah, who had undergone open heart surgery at age 2 to repair a hole in her heart. "I want to help kids who are going through that. I really want to accomplish this goal."

Her father has no doubt that she has the love and drive to see it through.

"When she was in the hospital, we were at one point where didn't know how things were going to turn out yet, her kidneys weren't working ... she was thinking about the other kids," he said. "When we were in ICU, Sarah saw a lot of things that most kids will never see. She never once felt sorry for herself or asked 'Why me?' It was always, 'I've got to get better so I can help.' As a parent, what else can you say but, 'Wow?'"