



spotlight on health

National Marrow Donor Program Celebrates Everyday Heroes

(NAPSA)—Firefighters are in the business of saving lives. They are often considered to be heroes.

“But heroes come in many forms. For patients who have a life-threatening disease, like leukemia, which could only be treated by a marrow or blood stem-cell transplant, their heroes are just everyday people, who gave them the gift of life,” said Lieutenant Steve R. Fortier, a firefighter and paramedic who donated marrow through the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP).

Leandra Argyros and Tonya Ghant received their second chance at life through transplants. They are grateful for their everyday heroes who selflessly have made their second chances possible.

A successful transplant gave Ghant, an African-American single mother, the chance to raise her young daughter and to pursue her dreams. “When I was diagnosed with leukemia, I wished for a second chance at life,” she says. Without a transplant, she would have died. Since her family were not suitable donors, she would need a stranger to give her a second chance at life.

“We were desperate to find a matching donor for my transplant. My daughter was just two at that time. I didn’t know who was going to take care of my daughter,” Ghant continues. “When the NMDP found my donor, it was the best Christmas present I could have received. The NMDP was my lifeline.”

These days, she is healthy and busy studying to become a nurse. She hopes to save lives, just as hers had been saved by others. “I will receive my nursing degree at the end of this year. I plan to specialize in oncology where I can show patients that I’m a living miracle. I want the patients to know that if they need my help, we can walk the road together. I got through it. I survived it and so can they.”



Tonya Ghant’s (L) marrow donor gave her the chance to raise her daughter, Arianna (R).

Thirteen-year-old Leandra Argyros is glad her doctors recommended an unrelated marrow or blood stem-cell transplant to treat her myelodysplastic syndrome. “If my doctors hadn’t contacted the National Marrow Donor Program right away, I probably would have died. My donor didn’t just give me a pint of her marrow, or some of her time,” she says. “She gave me another chance to see a tree. Another chance to hear my little brother laugh. Another sleepover at a friend’s house. Another math test. A chance to go to college. My donor gave me a chance to live up to my dreams.”

Each year, an estimated 30,000 Americans are diagnosed with life-threatening diseases, such as leukemia, for which a marrow or blood stem-cell transplant can be a cure. Nearly 70 percent of these patients will not find a suitable donor in their family and will turn to the NMDP Registry.

Although more African Americans, Asians/Pacific Islanders, Hispanics and American Indians/Alaska Natives are finding donors for their transplants, they are still less likely than Caucasians to identify a matched donor. More donors of diverse race

and ethnicity are needed, so that all patients will have an equal chance at finding a donor.

The NMDP Network Centers located nationwide will spread the news that marrow and blood stem-cell transplants save lives and issue the call for everyday heroes to come forward to become volunteer marrow or blood stem-cell donors.

“Everyone has the ability to make a difference. It doesn’t matter what you do for a living or who you are,” says Fortier. “You don’t have to enter a burning building to be someone’s hero. You too can make a difference. More everyday heroes are needed, so that all patients can have their second chance at life.”

The NMDP is committed to its mission to extend and improve life through innovative stem-cell therapies. It has facilitated almost 15,000 transplants throughout the world for patients with life-threatening diseases such as leukemia and aplastic anemia, as well as certain immune system and genetic disorders.

The NMDP offers patients who do not have suitable family donors a single point of access for all three types of stem-cells used in transplantation: marrow, peripheral blood and umbilical cord blood. Through its extensive network, the NMDP manages the largest and most diverse registry of volunteer donors, including more than 20,000 cord blood units.

Matching donors to patients is only part of NMDP’s lifesaving mission. The NMDP also provides support for patients and physicians, and conducts research studies aimed at increasing opportunities for and improving the outcomes of stem-cell transplants.

For more information, contact the NMDP at 1-800-MARROW-2 or visit www.marrow.org.