

Sadie Keller Foundation Helps Advance Childhood Cancer Treatment with Matthew Fleeger and Gulf Coast Western's Help



Sadie Keller is not your typical 11-year-old girl. In the spring of 2015, at the age of 7, she was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. The next three years of her life were filled with fighting infections, countless blood transfusions, very rare side effects and weekly chemotherapies that kept her out of school during 2nd and 3rd grade. Early in her diagnosis, Sadie began advocating and raising awareness for childhood cancer. She didn't want other kids to have to go through what she was.

Sadie received her last chemotherapy treatment in May of 2017. She beat the battle against cancer. Now, Sadie is not just a survivor, but she is an advocate and voice for all other children facing the battle that she faced in her life and that cost her a significant part of her childhood. By starting her own foundation, the Sadie Keller Foundation, the 11-year-old from Lantana, Texas has dedicated her time to making sure that other children's battles are easier than her own.

"I have always said this. I think cancer has made me a better person, and made me not just think about myself, but think about all those other kids who have to go through worse things than I had to go through," said Keller.

Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia, or ALL, is a cancer of the blood and bone marrow. More specifically, the cancer arises when the bone marrow makes too many immature lymphocytes. Those lymphocytes, also simply known as white blood cells, are typically involved in maintaining the body free from viruses.

Each year, more than 15,000 children are diagnosed with cancer, and the disease is the leading cause of death among American children and adolescents. However, childhood cancers are not well funded, receiving less than 4% of the Nation's federal funding to the National Cancer Institute for cancer research. The aim of the Sadie Keller Foundation is to raise awareness and improve treatment outcomes, lives and ultimately increase success rates of childhood cancer cases. Furthermore, the foundation awards children who reach milestones during their treatments by providing them with toys at each milestone.

Ultimately, Sadie has become an advocate for childhood cancer. Her Foundation has partnered with other Childhood Cancer Organizations, and Sadie has built a platform for herself to share her personal story and the reality of childhood cancer. Sadie's efforts include having spoken at the United States Capitol as well as the Childhood Cancer Caucus. She has also lobbied to members of Congress and has contributed to the passing of the Creating Hope Act, Race for Children Act and the STAR Act. Sadie has also appeared on National television.

Sadie's Wide Reach

Sadie's story has been covered by Fox News' America's News HQ, Varney and Col, and America's Newsroom. She has also been interviewed by Wolf Blitzer on CNN, and Lester Holt on NBC Nightly News. Sadie was interviewed by Inside Edition, a National news magazine that was featured Sadie's Sleigh, the Foundation's efforts to bring Christmas to hospitalized cancer-fighting children. Sadie's Sleigh collected over 1,300 toys when it first began in 2015. In 2018, a total of over 15,000 toys were collected and donated to 4 local DFW Children's hospitals and John Hopkins ALL Children's hospital in Tampa, Florida.

The Foundation's success largely relies on donations. At a fundraiser the Foundation threw in October of 2018 at the Crespi Estate in Dallas, Matthew Fleeger became inspired by Sadie's story, artistic ability and passion for helping other children who suffer from childhood cancer. As a cancer survivor himself, he had a tremendous compassion for the emotional and physical impact cancer can have on an adult but could not fathom the strength a child must have to endure that level of suffering. That October evening Matthew Fleeger decided to help make a difference and made a \$25,000 match donation, which allowed the Foundation to raise over \$150,000 that night.

Matthew Fleeger also decided he would commit his resources to help Sadie's Sleigh set a new record for their annual Christmas Toy Drive. Matthew Fleeger is the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Gulf Coast Western, LLC. where he is widely known for his expertise in the field of oil and gas exploration and production, but also has an extensive entrepreneurial background with successes in multiple business ventures including specialized waste management, as well as the tanning and restaurant industries. Gulf Coast Western, LLC focuses on the exploration and production of domestic oil and gas reserves with a primary focus in the Wattenberg Field in Colorado and the Gulf Coast Region of the United States. As Christmas approached, Matthew Fleeger rallied Gulf Coast Western and their 45 employees to the challenge and the team donated over \$14,000 worth of toys to Sadie's Sleigh, helping her easily eclipse her goal of 13,000 toys and bring Christmas to hospitalized cancer-fighting children across DFW.

Influencing Policy

Sadie has dedicated most of her time to her mission. Her efforts to help raise awareness have ultimately culminated in the signing of the STAR Act, which stands for Childhood Cancer - Survivorship, Treatment, Access, and Research, Act of 2018. This Act is a significant milestone as it enables expanded opportunities for childhood cancer research, enhances the quality of life for childhood cancer survivors, increases pediatric expertise at the National Institute of Health and provides enhanced resources for survivors and those impacted by kids' cancers.

According to Danielle Leach, co-chair of the Alliance for Childhood Cancer and senior director of government relations and advocacy at the St. Baldrick's Foundation, "We firmly believe that the Childhood Cancer STAR Act puts a number of policies in place that will accomplish our collective goal of accelerating the pace of progress against childhood cancer." Sadie stood next to President Donald J. Trump when he signed the bill.

Michael McCaul, a Texas Republican congressman, has been Sadie's ally ever since she began visiting Washington D.C. in early 2016, and speaking to congressmen about the importance of funding pediatric cancer research. Upon the signing of the bill, he added that "This is the most comprehensive childhood cancer bill ever passed by the United States Congress, and it would not have been possible if we didn't have the advocates strongly behind us. The children are the best advocates." "This will help survivorship treatment access to research and it is really going to move the cause and the movement forward in the right direction," he added.

Despite this immense success, Sadie has no plans to slow down anytime soon. Her mission has just begun, and she has several big goals in 2019 for Sadie Keller Foundation. "It is just amazing to think

that I am helping make a difference for all of those kids battling cancer, and who have passed away from cancer. And I just want to continue helping all of those kids, and that is my goal, to just get more awareness," said Sadie.