

CHILDHOOD CANCER - October 2020

Of the **15,700 kids** under age 20 diagnosed with cancer **every year** in the U.S., **over 50** of them are in Spokane. Besides those living in the immediate Spokane area, many come from throughout Eastern Washington, N. Idaho and Western Montana for treatment. Since protocols often last 2 to 3 years, the number in active treatment can be several times that. As you can imagine, a childhood cancer diagnosis is frightening and stressful and affects the entire family. Many parents report feelings of PTSD for years after their child is in remission. There are several wonderful nonprofits in the area that serve these families, each with its own niche in the pediatric cancer community. They all have important roles in helping families cope with their nightmarish situation.

I've been involved with one of them, the American Childhood Cancer Organization Inland NW (ACCOIN), first as a family receiving their services beginning 20 years ago, then a volunteer at events, and for some time now as a Board member and Treasurer. ACCOIN was started in 1977 as Inland NW Candlelighters by parents of kids with cancer, and it's still mostly a parent-driven organization. What impresses me about ACCOIN is they are "in the trenches" with family's day in and day out throughout the year, and provide a wide variety of services to the entire family:

- New Patient Bag at diagnosis – a large rolling duffel bag with resource books about childhood cancer for parents and child, plus practical and fun items including a binder full of tips from 40 years of parents' experience, thermometer, pill organizer, crusher and splitter, wet wipes, pens and highlighters, toiletries for hospital life, blanket, pillow pet, age-appropriate toy, Amazon Fire tablet, gas and grocery cards and more.
- **Support Groups individualized for parents, patients, siblings and teen/young adult survivors**
- Staffed office at Sacred Heart Children's Hospital - a refuge for emotional and financial support, childhood cancer information, toys or a snack. The full-time Patient Services Coordinator is an amazing, compassionate mom of a childhood cancer angel.
- **Toy "Poke" Box stocked with fun items from \$1 to \$5 to bring a smile when having a painful procedure or "poke"**
- Snack Basket, Food Cart and Care Packages
- **Special family events like the Christmas Party/Reunion and Summer Party where new families can meet veteran families who uniquely understand what they are going through**
- Christmas Adopt-A-Family
- **Bereavement Support – books, resource information, special gatherings to connect families, an annual candlelight vigil**
- Family Camps – special stress-reducing and bonding activities for the whole family
- **Monthly Support Lunch in the hospital - in partnership with local restaurants and ACCOIN funds, lunch is provided for families and staff alike.**
- Other family support – Valentines, Easter and Halloween treat bags, birthday club for patients and siblings.

ACCOIN accomplishes all this with a very small, dedicated, compassionate staff and many devoted, caring volunteers. You can find more information at: www.acco.org/inlandnw/. "It takes a village" certainly applies to childhood cancer families – they need all the help they can get to navigate a very traumatic time.

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