

Press Release

September 10, 2020

UP Kids Kick Cancer With Lions' Help

UP children with cancer, their siblings, and other children confronting serious illness can now take free martial arts classes to empower themselves. Lions across the UP are partnering with Kids Kicking Cancer to bring daily online classes to children across the UP. Kids Kicking Cancer offers virtual classes that explore breath, meditation, and traditional martial arts as tools to empower children who face serious illness.

September is recognized by many organizations around the world as Childhood Cancer Awareness month, so UP Lions are spreading the news about help that is available.

Kids Kicking Cancer was created in Michigan in 1999 by Rabbi Elimelech Goldberg, a black belt rabbi and clinical assistant professor of pediatrics. He lost his first child to leukemia at the age of two and brings a wealth of personal experience and sensitivity to dealing with children and families facing life-threatening illness. This program now teaches over 7,000 children in 90 hospitals and program locations in seven countries.

Kids Kicking Cancer also has a black-belt program for patients who are not responding to treatments. This end-of-life care program provides ongoing meditation and family focus in a palliative format that culminates in the child receiving a black-belt, usually a few days before he or she dies. Embroidered on the black-belt are the words "Master Teacher" because that child is truly teaching the world how to use the power of light to break through darkness.

One of the alumni of the first Kids Kicking Cancer programs is Michael Hunt, who now is a martial arts therapist with the program. A 20+ year pediatric cancer survivor, he holds a 2nd degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do. Michael has worked with Kids Kicking Cancer since 2005, teaching classes and working with hospitalized children. Sensei Michael says that one of the most helpful aspects of the program is its focus on empowerment. In the program, each child becomes a teacher to others. When asked what is your purpose? the children yell out, “To teach the world.”

Naami Kosofsky is Kids Kicking Cancer’s Social Worker. She coordinates free family support services, guiding parents to financial and social resources outside the program. She also develops additional programming, including social activities for families. Kosofky says the pandemic has changed how Kids Kicking Cancer provides services, making the outreach into the UP easier. Before the pandemic, classes were live and locations varied each day. Now, online classes are available each day wherever a child and his siblings are. Children in the program can attend as many days, for as long as they wish—even after the cancer treatments have stopped. Families interested in finding out more or enrolling in the program may contact Cindy Cohen at Kids Kicking Cancer, cindy@kidskickingcancer.org.

Children who participate also receive a uniform and a backpack with surprise gifts. UP Lions are reimbursing Kids Kicking Cancer for the cost of uniforms and backpacks, through a generous grant from the Graymont Community and Economic Development Fund and local fundraising efforts throughout the UP. Lions also assist families with cancer in several other ways, including financial assistance, free wigs offered Maggie’s Wigs for Kids, and Camp Quality.

Any family interested in these additional programs may contact Christine Smith of Engadine, the chair of the UP Lions Pediatric Cancer Initiative, at lionchris@906pcc@outlook.com.

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For more information about this press release, contact Ann Wood at annie.engadine@gmail.com or 906-629-1517.