

Kyanna Joy Darnell Flutter Buster Fund Profile

Seven-year-old Kyanna Joy Darnell's life was all too brief, but her legacy lives on. Thanks to the generosity of this courageous little girl as well as to the remarkable support of her family and community, the Kyanna Joy Darnell Flutter Buster Fund will enrich the lives of hundreds of Wisconsin children.

"We were inspired to create the fund because of the amazing generosity of others during a very difficult time for us," recalled her mother, Jeni Darnell. "We found out about Kyanna's diagnosis on December 4, 2014--a brain tumor that Kyanna decided to name 'Flutter.' Our approach to beating this tumor soon became dubbed 'flutter-busting.'"

While the Darnell family traveled to Spain seeking an effective treatment for Kyanna's cancer, the community rallied to support them both emotionally and financially. "All of a sudden, the Altoona basketball team was selling Team Kyanna T-shirts to raise money for us," said Jeni, whose husband works at Pedersen Elementary School in Altoona, where Kyanna attended second grade.

Numerous fundraisers and social media campaigns quickly followed, raising thousands of dollars to offset the family's travel and medical expenses. Community members in both Altoona and Owen-Withee participated. (The Darnells have strong connections to the Owen-Withee community; both Joe and Jeni graduated from Owen-Withee High School, and many of their friends and family members live there.) Jeni described their efforts as "an enormous rallying for an amazing little girl."

While the family was moved and humbled by extraordinary support of the community, it was Kyanna herself who provided the most remarkable examples of generosity. "Our daughter was what you would call a 'sharer,'" explained Jeni. "Right after her diagnosis, she was thinking of what she could bring home for her big brother, Ayden. She was making drawings and crafts for the nurses who were caring for her."

That wasn't all Kyanna did. "We gave her points for completing her therapies, and she could use those points to buy some toys on Amazon," Jeni continued. "This particular day, she typed in some items to search for. She got her cart all ready, and we ordered. When the items came a few days later, we helped her get them out of the box--and she then put the items back in our hands and said they were for us. Just a few days before she died, she shopped on Amazon and was searching for items that were for us too. They were set aside until she had more points. Sadly, she never lived to see those items purchased; however, we have since done so and have a special place for them in our home."

Even while facing such an intense loss, the Darnells were determined to create some good in the midst of tragedy. "The community, family, friends, co-workers, and many people that we don't even know rallied for Kyanna in a way that was so unexpected and amazing," said Jeni.

“The generosity of all those people is so inspiring, and that is one reason why we wanted to create this Fund.”

Money raised for the Kyanna Joy Darnell Flutter Buster Fund will be used to fund outdoor activities for students in the Altoona and Owen-Withee school districts; among other things, it will support field trips, community gardens, outdoor classrooms, playground equipment, and parks. Owen-Withee has already planted a butterfly garden in Kyanna’s honor and plans to expand it with support from the Fund.

“There are so many things that you will learn inside a classroom to prepare you for life,” said Joe Darnell, Kyanna's father. “However, life happens outside of the classroom too. We think that is important to remember. Kyanna also enjoyed playing outside, so designing this Fund in this way just made sense.”

Nothing can ever erase the sorrow of Kyanna Joy Darnell’s passing, but as long as children are laughing on playgrounds and exploring gardens created by her Fund, nothing can ever erase the memory of her courage and generosity either.