



Please help us again in 2010...

...Your donation as a member of the Set Sail for Hope Family truly has a meaningful impact on the quality of life for others.

We asked one family to share their personal story of the impact that cancer and Camp Trillium had on their lives.

Our thanks to the Ecclestone family for writing and sharing their experience with us...

"Hi Chris, It's Dr. McCall. The blood test results are back for Charlie and you were right, he hasn't had the flu for 4 weeks, it's not viral, but you were wrong too, it's not mono."

"So what is it?"

"We think it's leukaemia".

Imagine getting that phone call after coming home from work. Your 4 year old son has been sick for 4 weeks and every time you take him to the doctor you are told it's viral, take him home and wait it out. Your 2 year old daughter doesn't understand why her brother is still sick (neither do you), and your 5 day old son just got home from the hospital a couple of days ago.

I got that phone call. That call changed my entire family's life forever. My son Charlie was diagnosed with ALL just after his 4th birthday. My application to law school was half completed, and that's how it stayed. The next day my wife and I met with the oncologist for an hour – but don't ask me what she said at that meeting, I don't remember much about it. Charlie had a bone marrow aspiration that day – that I will never forget, but fortunately he has forgotten it.

The bone marrow aspiration signalled the beginning of three and a half years of what can only be described as absolute hell for our entire family. That's how long

Charlie had to be subjected to chemotherapy.

The chemo wasn't the only hardship we had to endure. Our children had been enrolled in full time day care since my wife and I both had to work. Group day care is a wonderful place to pick up germs, and the last place Charlie could be. Over the next three and a half years he would frequently have little or no immune system, and what would otherwise be a minor infection could very easily be fatal. We could not afford to drop to one income, so we had to find alternate child care arrangements.

I can't tell you how many day care agencies had room for our three children until they found out that Charlie had leukaemia – then they only had room for the younger two – they wouldn't take Charlie.

Charlie's friends couldn't visit. When they could, they often didn't. Many

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people, out of ignorance, were afraid of him. They might get cancer. They might give him something (that fear was often well founded, but not always). He couldn't do much except endure his treatment. He lost his hair more than once. The prednisone and decadron that he was on made his joints hurt and made him round – he looked like Charlie Brown. Wherever he went, people looked at him, stared at him. He noticed. How could he not? As they grew older, his brother and sister noticed too.

My wife was asked, by supposedly educated people, what she did that caused Charlie to get leukaemia. She was told she must have done something during the pregnancy – been too close to high voltage lines, not eaten properly, etc.

There was one place, one group of people to whom Charlie wasn't cancer, not a pariah – he was a child, he was a friend. That place was and is Camp Trillium. Ignorance has no place there. Prejudice is unknown. Charlie and his siblings were welcomed with open arms – no questions asked (except “What would you like to do?”).

Trillium volunteers and staff were at the hospital when Charlie was admitted, they were at the clinic when he was there, they came and visited him and his siblings at home and in the community, and they were at Camp too. Every single one of them was there only to help Charlie, Jennifer, Steven and my wife and I. They were not only willing to play with Charlie; they went out of their way to do so. To them Charlie was not a leper, he was a special friend. He was not avoided, he was sought out. Trillium staff and volunteers looked forward to seeing Charlie again, and he them.

Through Camp Trillium and all of its programs Charlie, Jennifer and Steven have managed to get through their battle with cancer – don't think for a minute that cancer doesn't affect the entire family – as well adjusted, happy, self confident children. There has also been support from Camp Trillium staff and volunteers for my wife and I, not to mention the strength we have drawn from the other families we met through Camp Trillium.

I have no doubt that Camp Trillium is largely responsible for my family having come through our fight against childhood cancer as well as we have. Who else could have a child looking forward to a visit to the cancer clinic?



Thanks to Camp Trillium my children have a childhood they can look back on fondly. The hospital and the cancer clinic are not scary places to Charlie or his siblings. How much is that worth?

I could write a series of books about our positive experiences with Camp Trillium, but I was only asked to write a short note.

Chris E.J. Ecclestone