MEET MAHOGANY

Mahogany and her mom walked into the Northern Regional Center shortly after Mahogany's cancer diagnosis, wondering what ECF was all about. They walked out with two toys, a box of Mahogany's favorite cereal, a birthday bag, and a Caseworker, Caitlin, to provide ongoing support. Since that time, Mahogany has undergone multiple treatments which included traveling to Texas for surgery. Last fall, she completed her final round of chemotherapy. She is currently being monitored at a hospital in New York City.

Mahogany lives with her younger sister, Sanaa, and their mom, a single parent and the main financial provider for the family. Mom took a leave of absence from her job after Mahogany was diagnosed, which put a huge financial strain on the family. Mom has since returned to work, and is just able to make ends meet. She is extremely grateful for ECF’s assistance.

Caseworker Caitlin has been providing Mom and her girls with much needed emotional support. Sister Sanaa has been having a difficult time because she has been fearful about Mahogany’s health while also missing her mother’s attention. Caitlin helped Mom find a support group specifically for siblings which has been incredibly helpful.

Laura, at ECF’s Northern Regional Center, has been able to provide Mahogany and her family with grocery deliveries which include at least six bags of nonperishable goods each month, in addition to donated clothes, toiletries, and other items (such as dolls, which the girls love) with each delivery. In addition to gifts for the girls during the holiday season, Caitlin also brings donated toys and gift cards for Mahogany and Sanaa throughout the year. After one such visit, Caitlin reported, “I provided both girls with gift cards from ECF. They shrieked with delight and thanked me repeatedly.”

Gift cards to Stop & Shop, gas cards, and clothing store gift cards have helped this family with everyday expenses. Laura also found the family a much-needed window air conditioner unit. Through the Regional Center, the family was adopted by Ho-Ho-Kus Girl Scout Troop 4161 which has been providing gifts, get well letters, and initiating fundraisers for the family. This past spring, the Troop invited Mahogany and Sanaa to their Movie Night fundraiser. The girls had a great time eating popcorn and watching movies in their pajamas!

Mahogany has returned to school and her hair has grown back. She is enjoying, in her words, “doing normal kid stuff.” Mahogany’s tumors still exist but they are not growing or changing, therefore no further treatment is needed at this time. She is still monitored periodically for tumor growth and based on the outcome of these scans she may need to resume chemotherapy. In the meantime, she is loving life, and enjoying being a super student at school and a role model for her sister.

WORKING TOGETHER TO HELP FAMILIES

Patti and Darryl Vigon of Miss Patti’s School of Dance in Midland Park, are no strangers to pediatric cancer. Twenty years ago their daughter Julie died from a form of bone cancer called Ewing’s sarcoma. Julie was only twelve years old and a talented ballerina. Today, the Vigons proudly operate Miss Patti’s School of Dance where children can experience the joy of dance that Julie loved. But the Vigons have not forgotten the trauma of childhood cancer. Through JULIEDANCE, created to honor Julie’s memory, dance students from Miss Patti’s School of Dance are given the opportunity to perform with talented professionals in productions which, in addition to fostering appreciation and participation in performing arts, are fundraisers for pediatric cancer research, care and treatment. A highlight performance is “The Nutcracker” presented during the holiday season. Proceeds from this performance benefit organizations supporting research, care and treatment of pediatric cancer: organizations such as ECF.

As a result of these fundraisers, every year for the past five years, Miss Patti’s School of Dance has invited ECF kids and their families to see a Broadway show. This summer approximately 30 ECF families, accompanied by three ECF Caseworkers, were thrilled to see Aladdin on Broadway. The outing included transportation, lunch, tickets to the show, and many smiling faces! We loved getting notes like this one from an ECF mom: “Thank you for thinking of our family for the trip into New York to see Aladdin. It was an awesome show and a great day. We also sent a letter to Miss Patti’s School of Dance thanking them for the wonderful day. My son and I also do fundraisers and know how much hard work and time it takes to accomplish. We just wanted them to know how much their hard work is appreciated.”
Dear Friends,

In case we haven’t met, my name is Joann Passantino and I am privileged to be ECF’s new Acting Director. I am proud to continue the important work of my predecessor, Carol Davis, and find that working so closely with such an incredible staff is quite the honor! During my few short months in this new role, we have been brainstorming about the ways in which we can continue to ease the fear and stress that burden our families.

I am no stranger to ECF, having served as the Eastern Regional Director for the past 21 years. WOW. How did 21 years go by so quickly? During that time I had the honor of working with so many folks who poured their hearts and souls into fundraisers, holiday wish lists, birthday programs, and the food delivery program, just to name a few. And I know that theme spans throughout the state.

As we wrote this edition of Outlook, two things struck me. One being the length of time so many volunteers and donors have been with ECF. As you read about some of these people you will see numbers such as 15 years, 10 years, and the phrase “year after year”. That reverberates for me, cementing what I have always said. ECF supporters are loyal and believe so strongly in our mission that it is staggering. What better testimonial to our services can there be?

Secondly, I also noticed how many ‘family’ groups are involved: parents, children, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, extended family and friends. It’s a theme that repeats itself. ECF is an environment that nurtures not only its families who need services, but its supporters as well. Enough so that a single volunteer draws in their group of loved ones to be a part of something bigger than themselves.

Throughout my 21 year journey at ECF I have witnessed so many successes and watched as we faced various challenges. We have grown and we have changed, but the one thing that has not changed is that pediatric cancer is unfair. It’s devastating and it’s heartbreaking.

So while you peruse this newsletter and reflect upon the part we all play in ECF, I hope you’ll remember this: when we put this newsletter back on the kitchen table, the suffering, the terror, and the uncertainty of ECF’s families remains. Please remember all the many ways you can make a difference in their lives: from hosting a food drive to adopting a birthday month or from getting your school or company involved to host a fundraiser, it all makes a difference.

And ever so important, donations can be sent in the enclosed envelope. Every little bit counts in a huge way and no form of help is ever too small. We count on you, our supporters and volunteers, to allow ECF to carry on the good work it does. I look forward to continuing my journey with you and ECF for the next 20 years and beyond.

Thank you,

Joann Passantino
Acting Director

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**VEHICLE DONATIONS**

A free, convenient service for converting that extra car, truck, or RV into a tax deductible donation benefiting Emmanuel Cancer Foundation Inc. You can donate online at v-dac.com or call 877-999-8322 to make your donation.

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**let us remember... Evan Zachary**

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[Caitlin and Mom at the 2014 Northern Regional Bash]
The **Impact of Your Volunteer Hours**

WHEN Central Regional Director Barbara began asking volunteers to run a new Tricky Tray fundraiser, she couldn’t imagine that an entire community of people would rise to the challenge. The energetic committee of Andy Waskin Abramowitz, Jody Bergamotto, Pattie Constanzo, Jen Cooney, Mary Corsentino, Jeanne Desmed, Debbie Essing, Jess Furino, Patty Samuelian, Stacey Schram (MC), Rita Slattery, Karen Stone and Donna Tamburri worked tirelessly during an intense two-month period. The results were outstanding! The event was quickly sold out with 250 guests who tried their luck at more than 245 baskets. All told, this hard working committee helped to raise well over $14,000! Praise like this from attendees was plentiful, “The Tricky Tray was amazing and to think that you put it together in two months was unbelievable. Congratulations on this special event.” According to Regional Director Barbara, “The success of this event goes to every single member of this committee. They are amazing women and I am so grateful to know and work with each of them.”

A Special Educator for Early Intervention at Children’s Specialized Hospital in Toms River, Tracey Sturman has been volunteering in the Eastern Region for more than 15 years. Tracey loves helping people, so when she heard that ECF needed drivers to deliver food to families, she was happy to volunteer. Over time she has become more involved and has added fundraising, office duties, and event support to her list of ECF activities. Over the years, her children began volunteering at ECF as well. Most recently, daughter Rebecca conducted a wonderful school supply drive for ECF kids at Staples where she works. Along with helping others, Tracey enjoys spending time with her family. Proud mom Tracey is pictured center with daughter Rebecca and son Kenny.

When **Joseph Lehey** read about an ECF family several years ago in the local paper, he was very touched and knew he needed to get involved. Since then, Joe has gone above and beyond as a volunteer in the Northern Region, playing a significant role as a food delivery driver. Regional Director Laura can rely on Joe to drive anywhere to make sure families have their monthly food delivery. According to Laura, “Joe has often had to drive eight families at once. He is a valuable asset and he makes the holidays enjoyable for the families he serves.” According to Joe, “ECF does such wonderful things for so many families. Just seeing the joy and relief in their faces with the simplest of deliveries of food and diapers is more than enough reason to volunteer alone!” In addition to helping ECF, Joe finds time to volunteer with Wyckoff Meals on Wheels and the Bergen County Volunteer Center. He has also adopted seven rescue dogs and continues to foster care for the Closer to Home Dog Rescue and Sanctuary.

Upon retirement **Ray Solecki** decided that he wanted to give back to the community. When he contacted a local volunteer center, we are happy to say he was referred to the Southern Regional Center. That was 15 years ago! Since then, Ray has helped with various jobs in our food pantry and currently he volunteers as a food delivery driver. A retired golfer, Ray enjoys spending his free time with his four grandchildren. About his time with ECF Ray says, “I get much more out of volunteering than I put into it. I have met so many wonderful, special people along the way.”

**MAKE A LASTING GIFT** — Remembering ECF in your will is meaningful and quite simple. If you would like more information, you can contact your financial planner or attorney, or give us a call at (908) 322-4323.

To You

FROM THE DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

SINCE THE SPRING edition of Outlook, we have had some exciting funding news:

- In June, the Independent Order of Odd Fellows of New Jersey hosted their Awards Dinner in Atlantic City where Central Regional Director Barbara and Southern Regional Director Nicole were presented with a check for $20,000 to ECF. We are so very grateful to **Steve Wooten**, ECF’s Board Vice President and Odd Fellows liaison, as well as all members of the Odd Fellows for their years of generosity and support.

- After being nominated by Boeing employee and ECF volunteer **Karen Stone**, ECF was selected by employee vote to receive a one-time donation of $15,000 generated by Boeing’s On the Move Competition. We were thrilled to be chosen and were honored to meet the caring staff at a reception in Boeing’s Berkeley Heights facility.

- The following foundations, corporations, and organizations have all renewed support of our programs through grants and donations: The Robert & Joan Dircks Foundation, The Westfield Service League, The Meta C. Mergott Foundation, and Plymouth Rock Management Company of New Jersey.

As always, please know that we appreciate all who contribute - your donations are critical to our ability to offer services and while we cannot list each donor individually, donations of every size are important to ECF. For example, $25 can help pay for a parent’s meal while at a child’s bedside in the hospital and $1,000 can help us provide our comprehensive package of services to a family for one year. If you are able to make a donation today, an envelope is enclosed for your convenience. Thank you to all who support ECF’s mission.
"I wanted to thank the Emmanuel Cancer Foundation for all the support and generosity they have given us in the past seven years. It really means a lot to our family to know that there are so many people that care about us. In the beginning of Sergio’s illness I felt helpless, but having a person to talk to has helped me deal with my tough times. Thank you, Emmanuel Cancer Foundation, for all of your help."

"Our family would like to thank the Emmanuel Cancer Foundation for always reaching out and helping us when Johnny was on treatment and even now that he is off treatment. Birthdays, food deliveries and inviting us to special events always lifted our spirits and helped us when we were down."

"Brianna loves her birthday gifts. She wants to thank you!"

"We would like to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for all the support you are giving us at this very difficult time. What may be very small for some is just huge, thoughtful and even uplifting for us. Thank you for thinking about us and helping us stay strong through our daughter’s rough and challenging time."

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**The Community Reaches Out**

Volunteer Kelly Holecek is at it again! Kelly has been with ECF since her high school days, when she and her friend Stephanie Schneider organized a carnival to benefit our families. Now a college graduate who has started her career, Kelly is still with us. She recently brought ECF abroad, running in the Paris Marathon and raising $2,300 for ECF in the process. Go, Kelly!

From food drives to contributions from employees to donations of tickets to events for our families, ECF is honored to have the support of Weltman Home Services. Just ask Jaeden, who was treated to a Somerset Patriot’s game, what he thinks!

Volunteering is a family affair for this energetic quartet. Sisters Izola Fix, Valerie Hall, and Celeste Cumo, as well as Celeste’s daughter, Jamie Laskowitz, (all pictured with ECF Board President Joel Markell) have been a steady presence in the Eastern Region, running the Holiday Wish List program for more than a decade and the Annual Spring Tea for nearly as long, and also working on the Gala committee, holiday party and annual holiday toy collection at 94.3 FM’s Pointsettia Bash. Their enthusiasm and charitable efforts extend beyond their immediate foursome, as they draw their entire circle of family and friends into everything they do, always putting ECF families’ needs first.

The generosity of the Corcoran brothers, Dennis, Gerard, John, Joseph and Kevin knows no bounds. These dynamic brothers (pictured with Northern Regional Director Laura) have been holding charity golf outings for many years. Last year we were honored to be the recipient of their event and we were thrilled to be chosen this year too! We were equally honored that the Corcorans came out to support our Bash fundraising event in March.

Since 2009 MSO has been supporting ECF. Generous employees in the Glen Rock office donate and collect food for families in the Northern Region, with deliveries to the pantry twice monthly. Additionally, they enthusiastically organize and conduct an annual charity golf outing on ECF’s behalf.

This summer Jack and Chris conducted a bi-weekly food drive in support of the Eastern Regional Center. During the first month of their efforts the boys collected more than 300 pounds of food from their neighbors in Brick. Wow!

Volunteer Kevin brought his daughters and his dog, Churchill, to deliver groceries to ECF child Logan and his family. All enjoyed big doggie kisses and playing fetch.

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Volunteering is a great way to help at ECF. We are always in need of volunteers for a variety of projects. Opportunities are available at all four Regional Centers throughout New Jersey.

**For More Information, Please Contact:**

Central Regional Center – Scotch Plains (908) 322-4323, ext. 17
Eastern Regional Center – Wall (732) 282-2324
Northern Regional Center - Midland Park (201) 612-8118
Southern Regional Center – Woodbury (856) 853-4803