At ECF’s recent Annual Crystal Gala, 7 year-old Avery won a joke contest against ECF board president Mike Walsh. Judged by the magnitude of audience claps, Avery beat Mike seven to nothing. How brave is it for a little girl to get up in front of hundreds of people and tell jokes? It isn’t just because it rhymes that her family calls their Facebook page “Avery and her Bravery.”

Avery was diagnosed with cancer in 2013, when she was only three. What she went through after that, and still endures, requires enough bravery for an adult, much less a tiny three-year-old whose life previously revolved around enjoying crafts, playing with friends, and visits to the library.

At first the doctors thought it was Wilms tumor. An hour and a half into a five-hour surgery, the surgeon came out and told Avery’s parents that she actually had stage 4 neuroblastoma and needed to start chemotherapy immediately. Over the next five months she endured many hospital stays, blood draws, medications, allergic reactions to those medications, several rounds of chemo, hair loss (twice), more surgery and numerous high fevers.

At one point, the family thought they were out of the woods. A radiologist told them Avery was in full remission. “We were so happy, it was the first time I was able to breathe a sigh of relief,” said Shara, Avery’s mom. Unfortunately, that lasted only three days. “The oncologist called me with such sorrow in her voice, I knew something was not right,” said Shara. Another hospital had reviewed Avery’s scan and found that she actually had full body cancer, in her skull, entire spine, shoulder blades, pelvis, thighs and bone marrow.

Avery’s harrowing journey continued. She endured IV radiation for 7 days. She had to be kept behind lead walls, where she could not be touched or held by her parents. “Every time she asked me to hold her, all I could do was say I could touch her for a brief second and only from over the wall. My heart hurt,” Shara recounted. This therapy destroyed her thyroid, but not all the cancer. Avery then had a stem cell transplant which caused life threatening complications. She was not allowed to have visitors other than her parents during her two month stay in the hospital. This was followed by 20 rounds of proton radiation treatments and six rounds of painful immunotherapy.

Avery and her family were going through so much. Their ECF caseworker helped the family with anything they needed—emotional support and regular deliveries of groceries—and gestures to lift Avery’s spirits and make her life more “normal” – Easter baskets and holiday gifts, birthday celebration kits and toys.

Thankfully, Avery is now fully in remission, so all the rigorous treatment paid off. But it also took a toll on her little body. She suffers long term effects: organ damage, stunted growth, cataracts, dental issues, kidney damage, and permanent hearing loss. Currently she is battling a benign tumor in her ear that necessitated complicated and lengthy surgery. But Avery is finally back at school and feeling much better, after a difficult recovery and much discomfort.

Despite all this, Avery is an amazing and loving child. When she was in the hospital, if she heard another child upset or crying, she would say, “Mommy, can we please give them one of my toys or stickers to make them happier?” Her mom says Avery has taught her so much—how to persevere, live in the moment, and “love on a deeper level.”

Her mom says Avery has taught her so much—how to persevere, live in the moment, and “love on a deeper level.”
I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it.

–NELSON MANDELA

What do you do when the worst fears about your child come true?

One of ECF’s families found this out in August 2015, when their son Jesse was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia at age 8, and they were thrown into a nightmare. The close-knit family of five faced the ordeal head on. “You have no choice,” said Jesse’s mom Michele. “You just have to move forward.”

The summer of 2015, Jesse had not been feeling well and his parents were worried. Blood tests revealed dangerously low hemoglobin, and the doctor ordered an immediate blood transfusion. When his diagnosis was confirmed, Jesse was hospitalized for two weeks; the next three and a half years were filled with intensive oral and spinal chemotherapy, 27 spinal taps, and multi-day hospital visits. He had an allergic reaction to one chemotherapy medication, eye pain that Jesse said felt like someone was stabbing his eyeball, and mystery rashes and skin issues. Though he missed most of the third grade, his teacher tutored Jesse and made sure he remained part of the class.

“I would stay strong for my son and be his advocate at the clinic and at the hospital,” said Michele. “My grief and sadness over the whole thing might come up at the end of the day or in the morning driving to work.” Thankfully the family received an outpouring of help from the community, friends, coworkers, neighbors and family. And Michele found ECF on the internet.

“Having a dedicated social worker for our family has been very important for me personally,” she said. “ECF has also helped us financially when emergencies have come up. We received monthly food packages, and Jesse and his older brother Wyatt got Christmas gifts from the ECF wish list. We are eternally grateful to Susan and Joseph Vizzoni for starting ECF.”

About a year before Michele knew Jesse’s treatment would end, she started thinking about how to thank everyone who helped them. “We are so grateful for all of the support we received. I thought about other families still going through treatment with their children.” The family planned an “End of Treatment Celebration” that doubled as a fundraiser for ECF. “This gave me something to look forward to, a way to end this part of our lives and start the next chapter for our family.” The event, held on Sunday, April 7th, 2019 raised over $5,000 in monetary donations, gift cards and organic food for ECF’s food pantry!

“Jesse just wants to be a regular kid, have friends and do things he enjoys—break dancing, Ninja Warrior training, playing the saxophone.” Michele adds that Jesse has always loved nature, animals, and flowers. “He’s very observant and notices the beauty in the world.” ECF is awed by this family’s beautiful generosity and thrilled to be able to celebrate Jesse’s good health.

TAX SMART GIVING: Looking ahead to the needs of future generations

There are many ways to help ECF. Did you know:

• If you are 70 1/2 or older you can take an IRA distribution up to $100,000 per individual per year paid directly to a 501(c)(3) charity and not pay income taxes on that distribution?

• You can gift up to $15,000 per year ($30,000 per couple) to a qualified charity without incurring a gift tax?

• You can gift highly appreciated stock to a qualified charity without incurring a capital gains tax and possibly a full deduction on the full value donated?

Please consult your tax advisor for more information. Thank you for thinking of ECF!
When you think of a role model you usually picture an adult who has earned years of wisdom and insight. But sometimes a kid comes along who inspires you with their thoughtfulness and amazing sense of caring about the world around them. Kevin Dougherty is one of these kids. Like many children who suffer from a chronic disease, Kevin is mature beyond his 17 years.

Kevin suffers from mast cell activation disorder, a rare condition that can trigger anaphylaxis by certain foods and exercise. When he was 10 he had a number of these life threatening events while playing soccer. His family took him to the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota where he was diagnosed with the syndrome. “I sat in the pediatric phlebotomy waiting room with close to 100 sick children whose parents were hoping for a miracle cure,” Kevin told us. “Almost every child, except myself, had cancer. I was fortunate enough to receive my diagnosis but soon realized through maturity that most people were not as fortunate to have the funds to fly across the country for medical treatment. In turn, I wanted to help as many children as possible that were not as fortunate as myself, and that meant children with cancer.”

Kevin knew about ECF from his father Paul, who is an ECF Board Member. Kevin decided to help by soliciting items for the silent auction at ECF’s Annual Crystal Gala in February. He visited local retail stores, contacted merchants through email and requested support from school friends.

He raised over $5,000 in donations, including a $4,000 trip to Aruba, fitness memberships, gift cards, and baseball tickets. ECF publicly honored Kevin’s hard work and generosity at the event.

“I understand what that fear feels like. What anxiety goes through your mind when you feel you may not live,” says Kevin. “I have had many near death experiences including anaphylaxis and cardiac arrest. I have a loving family who stands by my side every day and drives me monthly for my treatments with a specialist in Boston. I hope my contributions can help several families feel more comfortable during their difficult time. You never know what life has in store for you, but we can all stand together in support.”

Despite the challenges of managing his illness, Kevin is captain of the cross country team, plays lacrosse and has aspirations to attend an Ivy League university and work on Wall Street. “He is very serious and focuses intensely on his schoolwork,” says Paul. “But he also enjoys playing sports and the outdoors. We are very proud of him!”

ECF IS GRATEFUL TO THE FOLLOWING FOUNDATIONS AND CORPORATIONS THAT PROVIDED RECENT GRANT SUPPORT:

- Arnold A. Schwartz Foundation
- Ascienzo Family Foundation
- Benjamin Moore Co.
- Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation
- Eisai
- Ellis Family Charitable Foundation
- Franklin Lakes Lions Club
- Holmdel Fire Company
- JennJoe Fund of the Community Foundation of NJ
- Johnson & Johnson
- Joseph Lapinski Foundation
- Lerch Family Foundation
- Manasquan Savings Bank
- Merrick Family Foundation
- New York Community Trust
- Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church
- Party With Purpose
- Preferred Home Health Care and Nursing Services
- Rite Aid Foundation
- Robert and Joan Dircks Foundation
- Sclafani Weisberger Family
- Select Equity Group Foundation
- St. Elizabeth’s Church
- The Clock Tower Foundation
- The Witches of East Greenwich
- Thomas H. Hamilton Foundation
- Wawa, Inc.
- Zack Latteri Foundation

Thank You!
Londyn was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia a few weeks before Christmas 2016, which became the beginning of the family’s worst nightmare. Chemo caused Londyn to briefly lose the ability to speak or walk and she caught numerous illnesses, including fungal pneumonia which necessitated her being intubated for 18 days.

“ECF was there from the start!” says Londyn’s mom. “You all have provided our family with so much more than monetary things but with love! Something that is rare to find in basically strangers! The effort from the volunteers to drive to our home, miles and miles away, to deliver gifts, clothing and food says a lot of how genuine and generous this organization is!

To provide Christmas to an almost Christmas-less home because of finances being close to none, was definitely appreciated. The two beautiful social workers that we have been assigned that listened to our needs, and even when I didn’t express a need they heard anyway and went above and beyond to be there not only for Londyn but for our whole family!

ECF, in a nutshell, has been a beautiful blessing! We appreciate ALL that you do! The sweat that goes behind everything that’s put together so nicely for us – that’s what we appreciate the most!! As you know, the road is not easy. It’s great to have a support team like you all behind us, as we travel this bumpy road. You all have definitely become family!! “

ECF is committed to helping families. We don’t need them to thank us for that. In fact, we thank them for inspiring us with their resilience, bravery and perseverance. But it warms our hearts and affirms our mission when we hear kind words like these.