



*Jacob's Heart Children's Cancer Support Services provides extraordinary support to children with cancer and their families. But, how does this happen?*

Our staffing profile is very lean, and amazingly there are only 6 employees that make it all happen. As Executive Director, I am pleased to introduce our Jacob's Heart staff:



**Belinda Rubalcava, Clinical Supervisor/Family Specialist,** joined Jacob's Heart in 2010. Belinda works with families in Monterey and San Benito Counties. She is bilingual and a licensed clinical social worker.



**Susie Garcia, Bilingual Family Specialist,** just completed her MSW at San Jose State University this spring. She has been with Jacob's Heart for 6 years, and works with families in Santa Cruz and South Santa Clara Counties.



**Bridget Goin, Family Specialist,** recently earned her license as an MFT (Marriage and Family Therapist) after serving as an MFT Intern with Jacob's Heart for 3-1/2 years. She works with families in Santa Cruz and South Santa Clara Counties.



**Angel Moon, Business Office Manager,** has worked with Jacob's Heart in the capacity of bookkeeper and administrative assistant. Her current position involves both of these responsibilities and includes oversight of fiscal management. She has been with Jacob's Heart for 2 years.



**Elizabeth Semmelmann, Office Support and Volunteer Coordinator** has worked at Jacob's Heart for 10 years. Elizabeth has been instrumental in the development of Jacob's Heart volunteer program and

has provided ongoing clerical and office support over these years.

Also in this past year, we have participated in the AmeriCorps Program with the placement of **Emma Gilman**, Volunteer Coordinator. We thank Emma for all her hard work, enthusiasm and diligent service to Jacob's Heart!

Respectfully,  
*Susan Osorio*  
Executive Director

## Newsletter for Jacob's Heart Families and Friends

# HEART TO HEART

### SISTERLY LOVE & FAMILY STRENGTH

*The two sisters cuddle together on the couch intently watching "My Sister's Keeper" for the third time. Though it's a sad story, it has become one of their favorite movies - a movie that reminds them of themselves and an experience thankfully coming to an end.*

*Together, the sisters await this month's celebration that will recognize on the same day Sirena's 9th birthday and Ciara's one year anniversary as a cancer survivor at the tender age of 5.*

It began in 2008 when Ciara was only 2-1/2 years old and was having seizures. Doctors weren't quite sure what was causing them except for the frequent high temperatures she was experiencing. Her mother, Mercedes, knew something was terribly wrong with her daughter and felt instinctively that it couldn't just be seizures. Eventually, one test indicated low blood counts and they were rushed to Lucille Packard's Children Hospital. Within 4 hours, the doctors informed her that Ciara had cancer - leukemia. "Just like that", Mercedes said, "I didn't know what to think. My child has cancer?" Cancer was about the last thing she ever expected. At that moment, their lives had changed and Ciara was about to undergo two years of chemotherapy treatments.

The chemotherapy included an injection in her spine that was painful and disturbing. Later she received the treatments at home through a port which thankfully diminished the pain. Mercedes stated how hard it was for her seeing her child sick. "We had to become stronger as a family to deal with it. It was really hard to accept the fact that your child is sick. It's the worst!" The chemotherapy ranged from a two week hospital stay to once every 2 weeks to once a month. After one strong dose of chemotherapy early on, Ciara lost her hair in a matter of three days. The family was advised to pull her pillowcase out in the morning before she saw it covered with hair. They so wanted to protect her at that time. Yet when Ciara lost her hair, Mercedes remembered that she responded by becoming very "girly." With no hair on her head, Ciara became attracted to hats, little outfits that matched her hats, shades, and make-up. She became very interested in her appearance and with a smile on her face, really looked quite adorable.

Mercedes' husband, Alberto, was fortunate enough to be given a leave from work to spend time with Ciara when she was first admitted to the hospital. Mercedes on the other hand struggled with a job that only allowed her to be there on the weekends. Gratefully, that changed after Mercedes quit that job and found a place working at a hospital in San Jose where she has received tremendous support. She was given Wednesdays & Thursdays off so that she could be with Ciara for her Wednesday chemotherapy appointments. She feels fortunate after being there for two years with the flexibility needed to support her child and family. She works the swing shift beginning at 3pm, and Alberto is home by the time the girls come home from school. Alberto spends a lot of time with the girls, Mercedes remarking that they are all becoming great cooks. You can see in her eyes how lucky she feels to have him. Fortunately, they have faced the challenges of pediatric cancer together, and based their success on strong communication. When Ciara was first diagnosed, Mercedes commented on how easy it was to seek solitude and not to have to talk about it. However, they both knew the importance communication would have in their lives, and the long journey that lay before them proved them right. On, March 6, 2010 when Mercedes got the call at work that Ciara's cancer was gone, she ran down the hall screaming to her boss, then immediately called Alberto as she cried on the phone sharing the great news.



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## IT'S A FACT:

Jacob's Heart currently supports 120 children with cancer. We have had more referrals this year than ever before. The contributions you provide will help alleviate the financial and emotional stress that families encounter when dealing with pediatric cancer.

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Sirena, too, had her challenges as a young girl of 7 years trying to understand and deal with her younger sister's illness. Mercedes remembers her teacher asking if everything was okay at home. Sirena was not as attentive as usual at school, and when Mercedes replied that her sister had just been diagnosed with cancer, the teacher clearly understood. While Sirena didn't always express it, the experience was difficult for her, too. It was hard to concentrate, and life was becoming very complex.

Mercedes can point to a number of supports that have helped them along the way - church, family and outside assistance. Prayers helped them get through a great deal of anxiety and pain. Going regularly to church really meant a lot during this time. As well, the support from their families has been awesome. For one, Ciara's grandfather sat by her side during the first two weeks of her hospitalization. "I'm not going home until she does!" he proclaimed. And, to this day, when grandpa visits, Ciara squeezes next to him to cuddle up and never leaves his side. Her five aunts and uncles were there too, often driving the three hour round trip from Hollister to the hospital to be there for them. Knowing that Ciara could be admitted to the hospital upon any appointment, Sirena stayed with her auntie so she could lead a somewhat normal schedule back at home. Mercedes mother-in-law helped by cutting Ciara's hair to ease the loss of it falling out - something very difficult for Mercedes to handle. Their whole family has been there throughout their ordeal, and continues to be.

In 2010, they learned of Jacob's Heart Children's Cancer Support Services from another family that they had met at the hospital and from Coastal Kids, a home health care agency that provided nursing care for Ciara to stay at home. "We received a call from the social worker and on her first visit...it was like we'd known each other" recalled Mercedes. She felt very comfortable with her new Jacob's Heart Family Specialist who brought gifts to the girls. "The girls were very excited going through their gift bags," she said. Since that time, Mercedes appreciates the support from their social worker and her ongoing calls and visits to check in on them. The financial assistance program has been very useful providing gas and grocery cards for the long trips to and from the hospital, especially with the increasing high costs of fuel. They have participated in Art from the Heart, the Holiday Party, and the Kids Card program. They attend Art from the Heart whenever they can. Mercedes commented that Alberto is always there because he "loves to see the girls so happy!" When this year's Holiday Party came around, both sisters announced, "Let's go, let's go, we don't want to be late for Jacob's Heart!" Their favorite program, however, is the Kid's Card program. Each month, they receive handmade cards written just for them with special activities inside. When they see their personalized cards (and for Ciara, in her favorite color of purple), they comment cheerfully, "How do they know, Mom? How do they know?" Mercedes answers every month, "They just know!" Teary-eyed, Ciara says, "I need to write a letter to thank them."

Ciara recently told her mom, "Mommy, some people die. But not me, huh!" And, out of the mouth of a 5-year old, she says proudly, "I kicked cancer's butt!" On her wall by her bed, a Relay for Life poster reads, "Cancer sucks." In her Kindergarten class this year, she told her teacher, "I had cancer but I don't have it no more!" The teacher could only respond with one word - "Wow!" Since her hair has returned, it's thick and falls beautifully down her back. "Daddy, my hair's long, right?" she asks continually. This new look has made Ciara very photogenic. She loves pictures and especially showing off her latest hair style. "She wears her hair up, she wears it down, and she adds barrettes! You can't even open the window of the car because she'll tell me that I'm messing up her hair," said Mercedes of her daughter's enthusiasm. "Ciara is what makes us strong," remarked Mercedes. On the cake for Ciara's Survivorship anniversary celebration, she wants a Relay for Life ribbon on it that says, "I'm a survivor!"

Today, the two sisters are closer than ever. Dinner prayers not only include a special thank you to God and her family spoken from Ciara, but also involve a nightly prayer from Sirena who says, "Thank you that my sister is better!" When Ciara was offered a wish from the Make a Wish Foundation, her first question was, "For my sister, too?" And, together, the family spent a week at Disneyland. You'll see the girls walking up to everyone requesting pennies to support the Lymphoma and Leukemia Society, and Ciara announcing that "they're for kids with cancer, like ME." And, when the cards come from Jacob's Heart each month, the two girls race out of the house. Mercedes says that she's not allowed to check the mail if they suspect the cards might be inside the box. "I got it!" they both scream rushing to the mailbox. "Sister, help me!" calls Ciara when even on her tiptoes she can't reach the mail. Moments later the two of them sit side-by-side on the carpet happily opening their cards, spreading glitter all over the floor. Life is moving on...



**Jacob's Heart**  
Children's Cancer  
Support Services

### Santa Cruz Skateboards Deck Up to Help Our Children



NHS, one of the most recognized action sports companies in the world, has developed a line of skateboards to support Jacob's Heart. The new line is represented through the color purple in the Screaming Hand symbol.

Look for the purple hand wherever Santa Cruz products are sold. Purple hand T-shirts and stickers are expected to be released soon. 100% of the proceeds from the sales will benefit Jacob's Heart! To purchase these products go to: [WWW.NHSFUNFACTORY.COM](http://WWW.NHSFUNFACTORY.COM)

## JACOB'S HEART DELIVERS SERVICES THROUGH HEART ON WHEELS!

HeART on Wheels was designed to improve access to counseling, support groups and art therapy programs for families residing in the more outlying areas of Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Benito and South Santa Clara counties. HeART on Wheels lessens the amount of travel time required of Jacob's Heart families by having our Family Specialists bring services and programs directly into their homes and communities.

In order to augment our existing programs to include mobile services, funds were generously donated from foundations, businesses, service organizations and individuals. We would like to thank them for supporting HeART on Wheels as a new delivery system - with the end result of improving and expanding services to families!



### A special **THANK YOU** to:

- Hospice Foundation and the Community Foundation for Monterey County Partnership
- Community Foundation for San Benito County
- Gilroy Foundation
- Gilroy Foundation Youth Board
- John Dolores Kent Family Fund through the Gilroy Foundation
- Rotary Club of Morgan Hill
- McDill & Associates

# 2011 Spring Fling Celebration



*"My family had a wonderful time at the spring fling! A magic show, horseback riding, face painting and jump house, how do you guys do it all? Well I just wanted to say thank you for making us feel welcomed and you guys totally ROCK!"*

*– Anna, Jacob's Heart Mom*



**This year's event was a great success! As Anna mentioned, there were many exciting activities for the children and they had such fun. Hosted by the Santa Cruz Sheriff's Posse in April, Jacob's Heart children and their families had a great time spending the day together - and it didn't even rain!**

**The pictures tell the whole story...**



## "I Am A Cancer Survivor..."

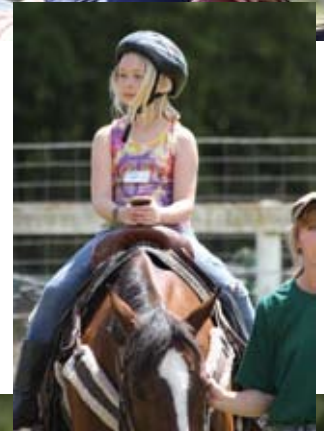
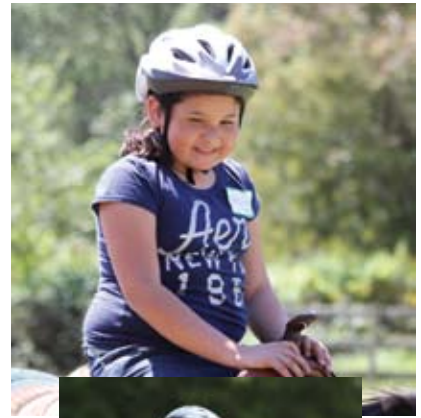
By Marissa, age 12

*I am a cancer survivor who faced death in the eye.  
I wonder if I could have died.  
I hear my scream for help.  
I see the fear inside of me.  
I want to not have felt all that pain.  
I am a cancer survivor who faced death in the eye.*

*I pretend that it wasn't such a big deal.  
I feel the pain from so many years ago.  
I touch my heart to make sure it's still beating.  
I worry that it will come back.  
I'd cry if it did.*

*I am a cancer survivor who faced death in the eye.  
I understand that people will think of me different.  
I say to never give up hope.  
I dream of cancer being cured.  
I try not to think about it.  
I hope to live life to its fullest.  
I am a cancer survivor who faced death in the eye.*

**Marissa was diagnosed with cancer at age 2 and continued treatment until she was 5 years old. She celebrated her 7 year anniversary as a cancer survivor on May 4, 2011.**





## Some Wings Fly by Motorcycle!

Jacob's Heart wants to thank the Monterey Bay Wings for their continued support to children with cancer and their siblings. Since 1998, the Wings have participated in an annual motorcycle Easter Drive delivering gifts to the children. They have provided baskets, stuffed toys, books, art materials and a variety of other gifts throughout the years.

Sonia O'Brien, the coordinator of the Easter Drive, has never missed a year since the inception of Jacob's Heart. She has come to know so many of the children over the years. "We watch these kids every year and see them grow. It's unbelievable to see children with cancer with such a will for life," she remarked, "They're so amazing!"

In addition to the Easter Drive, Sonia and her husband, Paul, joins us each year at the Kidrageous Carnival. They host the "Motorcycle Race Course." They'll be at this year's Kidrageous on September 18 at the Watsonville City Plaza – stop by and you'll see them on the grass happily watching children run their course!

The Monterey Bay Wings is the Northern California Chapter of the Gold Wing Touring Association, an international organization of touring motorcyclists. The Monterey Bay Wings Chapter covers Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito Counties.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP:

Sustain families in our community through our Heart Beat monthly giving program. Choose any amount you'd like to give on a monthly basis. Your donation is transferred automatically each month from your credit card or ATM/debit card to Jacob's Heart. A gift of any amount goes a long way...here are some examples of what your support can do:

- ♥ \$10 a month keeps our Kids Cards brightening the lives of children by sending special colorful cards made for each child
- ♥ \$25 a month helps a family get their child to cancer treatments 60 miles or more away from home by providing a prepaid gas card
- ♥ \$50 a month provides art supplies for our Art from the Heart art therapy program
- ♥ \$75 a month provides families a chance to receive comfort from peers and professionals by participating in a support group
- ♥ \$100 a month provides individual therapy sessions to children with cancer, their siblings, and parents.

Please stay in touch. You make our work here possible. Call us at 831.724.9100 or visit [WWW.JACOBSHEART.ORG](http://WWW.JACOBSHEART.ORG) for more information. Brochures are available in English and Spanish!

**Supporting Children and their Families**

*"The support, love and compassion of Jacob's Heart made everything about our son's treatment a little bit easier."* - Jacob's Mother

Jacob's Heart Children's Cancer Support Services offers families ongoing support through the phases of care, diagnosis, no treatment, treatment or remission. We provide assistance to all family members to help make life as normal as possible by connecting families with a community from which they can draw strength.

**Meet Jacob**  
 One story begins in 1998 when Jacob, at age five, was diagnosed with cancer. Jacob's family was overwhelmed by the complex needs of children in our community. The Jacob and Love Foundation, the parent of Jacob's Heart, was created to help meet the needs of our children. The Jacob's Heart program was developed to provide support, hope and love.

Please become part of the wonderful community of volunteers and donors who make a difference in the lives of children and families every day.

**Programs with Heart**  
 SERVICES ARE FREE AND AVAILABLE TO FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN FAMILIES TO AGE 18 DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER WITHIN SAN BENITO, SAN JUAN, MONTEREY, SAN BENITO AND SANTA SANTA CLARA COUNTIES. ALL SERVICES ARE OFFERED IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH.

<b>BILINGUAL SUPPORT GROUPS</b> meet and share experiences, feelings, needs, and concerns with others who have been through similar experiences. Offered in English and Spanish.	<b>DIRECT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE</b> support families during their child's treatment by providing financial assistance for travel, transportation, food, and other needs. Assistance is available for families with limited resources.	<b>BILINGUAL INDIVIDUAL &amp; FAMILY COUNSELING</b> offer the support and guidance that families need during this difficult time. Available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.	<b>Celebrations &amp; Milestones</b> honor the important moments in the lives of our children and families. Celebrations include birthdays, graduations, and other special occasions.	<b>Resources &amp; Referrals</b> provide parents with information on local and national resources. Offered in English and Spanish.
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Sign up at [www.jacobshheart.org](http://www.jacobshheart.org) by clicking on the **DONATE NOW** button!

This newsletter is dedicated to the memory of our beloved Board of Directors member, **Pat Fink.**



**Jacob's Heart™**  
Children's Cancer Support Services

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*Our mission is to improve the quality of life for children with cancer and support their families in the challenges they face.*

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