

Making a DIFFERENCE

by Carli Harrington

Jason's Friends Foundation hopes to attract 1,000 bowlers and raise over \$65,000 with its third annual bowling event at El Mark-O Bowling Lanes on March 3.

More than 97 percent of that money will go to children suffering with brain or spinal cord tumors and other childhood cancers.

"We can accommodate 200 teams of bowlers and that equals 1,000 bowlers," says Lisa Eades, a founder of Jason's Friends. "So our challenge is to really try and have every time slot and lane filled because the more bowlers the more revenue."

To get people to collect pledges and bowl, she says there are number of incentives.

"The more pledge dollars you bring in, the better prize you are potentially eligible for," says Eades. "There's an adult grand prize and six below that, and the same thing for the youth. And then there's a prize for the team."

For every \$50 a person collects, she says, he or she receives a ticket that puts them in a drawing for a helicopter sightseeing tour.

She says there's also free pizza from Pizza Hut and beverages from Pepsi, and it's just a festive event.

"People really enjoy getting out and doing this. And it's not a bunch of professional bowlers that are out there bowling. It's people that maybe bowl once every year or two," says Eades.

"It's a fun way to raise some money as opposed to just going out and asking for some money."

Kids like Daniel

It goes to help kids like Daniel Gawronski, who has had seven surgeries to remove cancer from his hand, armpit, elbow, chest, brain, and leg and to transplant bone marrow.

He's taken seven different chemotherapies, one being so strong it seeped through and burned his pores and ate the lining of his mouth and stomach.

He's "been stitched, stapled and

glued... and radiated enough to glow like a pumpkin on Halloween night," wrote Gawronski in a story of his experiences.

It's incredible what they've gone through, says Eades about Daniel's Gillette family who had put over 100,000 miles on their car in 18 months.

"This kid has had years of chemo treatment. He's just been sick and ill forever. And as far as what we've done to help them, a lot of it's traveling expenses, groceries, food, phone cards, school clothes, car repairs, tires."

And offering that type of aid to families is what Jason's Friends Foundation, a 100 percent volunteer, non-profit group, is all about.

With no primary cancer treatment center in Wyoming, expenses outside the cancer treatment really start to add up.

"They are forced to travel outside of Wyoming for treatment," explains Eades, "...Often going to Denver, sometimes Salt Lake, sometimes even further than that. Because of that,

with traveling expenses so they can get to wherever it is that they are going, and will also help with the economic impact at home.

"We help pay for things like house and apartments payments, utilities. We buy a lot of telephone cards. That's a big thing. When people are out of town, we make sure they can communicate back and forth. We pay for a lot of groceries."

She says they want to make sure a family doesn't have to lose everything just because they're in an unfortunate situation.

"One family we've worked with recently," says Eades, "whose child unfortunately lost her battle with cancer, told us point blank, that we were the difference between them needing to claim bankruptcy and not needing to claim bankruptcy."

"This foundation is what kept them in the water. That's what we're trying to do is make sure we can ease the burden just a little bit and let them concentrate on the child."

In addition to the financial support the Foundation offers, they also provide families with an advocate, or someone to help them emotionally.

Advocate Tisa Bilek says sometime she's there just for a shoulder to cry on.

In one Casper family's case, Bilek helped a mom make funeral for two daughters who were victims of cancer.

Whatever the case though, Bilek says the advocates are there for the long haul because cancer isn't a short-term illness.

"A lot of these kids have gone through many remissions," she says. "We have children who've been with us almost since the beginning. Some of these families have been ongoing for four years, not requiring help all the time, but off and on."

An event like the Bowl for Jason's Friends often raises awareness for what the organization is doing, says Eades, and they end up with a few new families. Because of the community support they have received in the past, Eades says they've never had to turn anyone away. She hopes this year's event will be as big a success.



Daniel Gawronski

immediately one parent, sometimes both, are having to leave a job and an income. So the economic impact immediately to these families is significant."

Lifting the border

Eades stresses that they are able to act very fast when a child is diagnosed with cancer because there isn't a lot of red tape and paperwork to fill out. So she says the Foundation will jump in right away and help families