

From one family's tragedy, help for others

Jason's Friends Foundation lends emotional, financial support

My big brother couldn't drink on his 21st birthday — doctor's orders.

While other kids his age partied all night and attended college classes all day, he was forced to stay at home with his family, watching daytime television as his hair slowly fell out.

Two days before Christmas 2005, when he was 20, my brother was diagnosed with Stage IV lymphoma, a blood cancer that affects the lymph system. His body was riddled with tumors — one on his back was so large it could actually be seen and felt through the skin. My family was devastated.

We spent the last few weeks of the year wondering what life would be like without Brian. As my mother prepared Christmas dinner, she silently prayed that she wouldn't outlive her only son, and wondered who would eat the leftover mashed potatoes next year if she did.

Chemotherapy started a few days later. And while we all thought nausea and missing hair and depression and endless medication were the worst parts of his cancer, we were wrong.

Cancer is unbelievably expensive, and most families — like mine — can't afford hospital bills and travel expenses



Megan Lee
STAR-TRIBUNE

Help support Jason's Friends

The annual "Bowl for Jason's Friends" fundraiser will be held Saturday, March 1, from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. at El Mark-O Lanes.

Team bowling packets, containing event and pledge information, are available at any First Interstate Bank location, any Hilltop Bank location, US Bank, El Mark-O Lanes, or Jason's Friends at 340 West B St.

For more information, call Jason's Friends at (307) 235-3421 or visit www.jasonsfriends.com.

es on top of regular household bills and time off from work.

And were it not for the

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kindness of groups like Jason's Friends, several Wyoming families every year would lose their homes or go hungry because the fight against cancer is costly in more ways than one.

When my mom learned that the hospital in northern Wisconsin, where Brian received treatments, wasn't insurance-friendly, she knew we were in trouble. At an average of \$25,000 in hospital bills every three weeks on top of hotel stays, medication, and usual household costs, cancer was bankrupting our family.

Jason's Friends is a foundation designed to save families from having to choose between the health of a child and paying bills on time. By taking care of gas bills, house payments, and travel expenses, Jason's Friends supports families of Wyoming children, ages birth to 21, with cancer who have to seek treatment in other states.

"Thankfully there's a lot of good [cancer treatment] programs in other states," said Lisa Eades, co-founder of Jason's Friends, "but the sad part for Wyoming families is that there's no primary cancer treatment for kids at all in the entire state, so they're of-

ten whisked off to Denver or Minnesota, or further."

Eades co-founded Jason's Friends in honor of her son, who died after an almost year-long battle with a brain stem tumor. Eades said that during Jason's treatment, she watched families like hers fight cancer and lose everything they owned in the process. The foundation helped over 60 Wyoming families last year with financial and emotional support and information.

"We thought, we're not going to let this happen again," Eades said.

And they didn't.

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