

Honoring those who serve, spread the mission

CDS celebrates statewide volunteers in annual recognition ceremony

On September 17th, Carolina Donor Services (CDS) recognized the hard work of the Friends for Life volunteers during a banquet at the RTP Hilton. Volunteers were greeted with words of appreciation by CDS Director of Communications Dawn Hall and Vice-President/Chief Operating Officer Danielle Niedfeldt, while other CDS management team members were present to offer support and thanks.

Volunteers heard the touching story of keynote speaker Delores Benton Evans, a donor mother and kidney recipient. The event also featured Volunteer of the Year awards for each CDS region along with a Donate Life Extra Effort award. It was a wonderful evening and a great way to truly express gratitude to the volunteers who assist CDS in so many ways throughout the year. CDS is very fortunate and thankful to have such wonderful Friends for Life volunteers.

2010 awards winners are as follows:



2010 Volunteer of the Year Award Recipients: (back row): Kathy Payne, Mary Tucker, Terry Hall; (middle row) Corrine, Katie and Sandi Hall; (front row) Leslie Grace Hall

Volunteer of the Year:

- Eastern Region:** Kathy Payne
- Central Region:** Mary Tucker
- Western Region:** The Hall Family (Terry, Sandi, Katie, Corrine, and Leslie Grace)
- Donate Life Extra Effort Award:** Delores Benton Evans

National Donor Sabbath

This year National Donor Sabbath will be observed during the second weekend in November from the 12th to the 14th. Faith communities throughout the country will recognize this as a time to unite and increase awareness of the critical need for life-saving organ and tissue transplants.

Religious leaders are invited to spread the message of how important it is for their congregation to make a decision to donate and ultimately offer the opportunity to share the greatest blessing of all - the Gift of Life.

CDS is currently assembling free materials to distribute to pastors, churches and other faith communities for the observance of National Donor Sabbath. The deadline for requests is October 18th. This year our bulletin inserts will show the faces of two of our local volunteers. Hundreds of churches across the nation will distribute bulletin inserts and donor pins to congregations. Pastors will use sermon outlines by denomination to answer questions about the gift of life made possible through organ and tissue donation.

CDS is also able to make arrangements for speakers to address any size group to assist in educating the public about life-saving transplants. Please email Beth Hinesley at bhinesley@carolindonorservices.org for more information.

Reflecting on Almost 20 Years of Grief

BY VALERIE RABLER, DONOR MOTHER

Writing something for this newsletter, something specifically to donor families, has proven to be the most difficult task I have undertaken in all my years volunteering for Carolina Donor Services. My story and my daughter Dana's story are probably not much different than a lot of your stories. What can I say about loss and love that you do not already know? The biggest difference may simply be how much longer I've been bereaved; first enduring, then thriving.

It has been nineteen years, six months, fifteen days since our daughter Dana died while waiting for a heart transplant to save her from irreparable damage done by a common viral infection, but who's counting? Instead, I try to count my blessings: a stalwart husband by my side for almost 31 years; a son and a daughter grown into charming and responsible adults; good health overall for all my loved ones; a job that seems secure in this shaky economy; enough money coming in to pay the bills, and yet...and yet. Every good and bad thing is still measured by the yardstick that is Dana's absence.

I tell you this not to make you despair of ever feeling joy again. It's just that, for me at least, grief is something I have grown into rather than out of; it defines the me that is now and forever a bereaved parent. I tell people: "you do not get over it; you get used to it."

I continue to speak for Carolina Donor Services for two reasons: first, I truly believe that we are duty-bound to try to be the best people we can be. We help others and they help us. Agreeing to be an organ and/or tissue donor is the ultimate easy way to do this; it costs nothing but can mean so much to so many. People need to be reminded of this often enough until the idea of donation is not even something you think about – it is just a given. Second, Dana died so young – only 3 – that she had little opportunity to make her impact on the world; it is up to me to do it for her. Telling her story both honors her and consoles and reassures me that the world knows she existed and she still matters.

Our daughter Dana was a memorable girl. Sweet, smart, stubborn, determined, fearless in the face of adversity, she faced every day as a bright new challenge. When she became sick with a common intestinal virus that sidetracked to her heart instead and after months of drug therapy that should have healed her failing heart but didn't, she wound up in the intensive care unit waiting for a heart transplant to save her; she was waiting for a hero.

As we waited and hoped, I imagined how awful it might be for a parent, still frantic with the shock of unexpected bereavement, to face making any decision about anything, much less about letting their child be an organ donor. What parent could be courageous enough in the face of most terrible death to allow their beloved baby to save a life? Yet, we were certain that somehow everything would work out and that Dana would be ok.



Her condition deteriorated: a blood clot in her heart; oxygen tubes and multiple IVs and catheters; minor surgeries; the first heart attack, which led to a respirator; unstable blood pressure and kidney failure. When her heart stopped for the last time and when the doctors told us they could keep trying to revive her, but it just wasn't working, we stood in a cold early morning hospital hallway, less than 2 weeks after she went on the waiting list. We said "yes, it's okay to let her go" and then we asked "can she be an organ donor?"

You see, now frantic myself with the shock of unexpected bereavement, I found that facing the decision to let my baby be a donor was not so awful after all. It was so very clear that of course we wanted her to be able to help someone the way she had needed someone to help her. But the trauma of Dana's last two days left her organs too damaged to donate. Dana could give her corneas. So, Dana's eyes brought back sight for two people. She got to be their hero. Only 3 years old, her life over before she could grow up and change the world, but in this way she DID get to make a difference.



Why become a Friends for Life volunteer?

- Make a difference in the lives of thousands each year
- Spread the word about organ, eye and tissue donation
- Work with recipients, donor families and those awaiting a transplant

If you are interested, please email volunteer@carolinadonorservices.org with your name, full mailing address, county of residence, email and phone number. You can also call (800) 200-2672.

Daughter Just Wanted to Help People

BY BESSIE OAKLEY, DONOR MOTHER

At the age of four on a trip to Florida, Brittany organized all of the children at the hotel pool, making sure everyone was included as she shared her pool toys. Throughout her childhood, she was always the little girl who hosted sleepovers for her girlfriends and eagerly ensured that everyone was included. She was the little girl who played the flute, sang solos in school and church, and displayed an early desire to teach by helping teach music at Bible School.

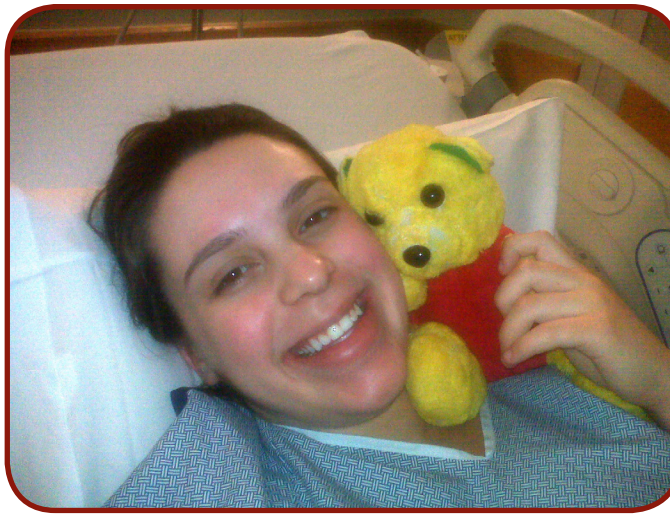
Brittany first displayed her love for animals at the age of three when she fell in love with a neighbor's white Labrador Retriever. Before long, Rolly belonged to Brittany. However, Rolly was a wanderer and soon ran away. Brittany was devastated, so the neighbor got her another dog, Ragan. Ragan was the beginning of a stream of adopted animals for which Brittany cared deeply. She adopted two feral cats from her grandparents' barn and successfully tamed both. It was no surprise when she volunteered to keep the first grade's rabbit over Spring Break and did not want to return Thumper afterwards. When Brittany left home, she insisted that we keep her two cats and three dogs because they were happy. Before long she had adopted and become the mother of six cats and three Pugs. Brittany was no stranger at Pet-Over-Population or the Hillsborough Veterinary Clinic because her animals received regular veterinary care.

When Brittany was thirteen, her paternal grandmother, who she referred to as "My Becky" died from cancer. Brittany was very close to Becky and stayed by her side in her final hours, as she comforted her younger half-sister. When Becky passed, Brittany independently wrote a paper about her grandmother, which she very maturely presented at the funeral, amazing us all beyond words.

At the age of seven, she began playing basketball, softball, and soccer. As soon as volleyball became an option, she immediately dropped soccer and tackled volleyball with a passion. She went to various sports camps at most of the local universities. Brittany played basketball and ran track for South Granville High School in the 9th grade; she played volleyball and pitched for the Durham School of the Arts in 10th grade. In the 11th grade, Brittany realized that she needed to focus on one sport, and her choice was softball. She took the lead role in organizing a fall softball team for two seasons, but quickly withdrew when the coach failed to give some of the inexperienced girls any playing time, emphasizing that winning should not be the only goal of sports. Brittany pitched for Cedar

Ridge High School in the 11th grade but as a straight A student chose to drop all sports and focus strictly on academics for her senior year. However, it wasn't long before she volunteered to help coach a recreation league softball team to help her fiancé's little sister. Before long, she was teaching the team to pitch and hit.

Brittany loved attending 4-H Camp every summer. When she was too old to attend as a camper, she volunteered as a Counselor-in-Training (CIT) and earned the CIT of the year award. Brittany also volunteered her services as an English as a Second Language Assistant. She loved the children and gave many of her own books and toys to the needy ones. This was the beginning of her desire to be a Spanish Translator and Teacher.



Brittany applied to NC State and was accepted, but when she found that Alamance Community College offered a Spanish Translator Certificate, she chose to attend there as a University Transfer Student.

At the end of her first year at Alamance, Brittany found out that she was pregnant. The timing was not ideal, but Brittany chose to be ecstatic! She took extra classes so she could get her Associate's Degree on schedule and carefully planned and setup everything for the arrival of her son, Andrew, at Christmas. She proudly displayed the ultrasound pictures of Andrew on her cell phone, saying that he had her nose. Brittany carefully followed the instructions of her doctors; she wanted to ensure that Andrew would be perfect. She had a perfect pregnancy but passed immediately after pushing out the placenta at the age of 19.

Yes, Andrew is perfect. He has her nose, expressions, and so much more. Not only did she make a difference for her baby boy, but as a donor she enhanced the lives of 60 people. Even though we are experiencing extraordinary sadness over our loss of Brittany, Andrew helps us remember her almost constant smile and laughter.

It was not surprising when Brittany chose to designate herself as an organ donor on her driver's license application. As a teenager, she often commented that she just wanted to make a difference in this world. She accepted Jesus as her Savior when she was 11 years old, and even though she was not perfect, she lived a life that was indicative of her desire to be a good role model. Her fiancé's two sisters, her two half-sisters, and her cousins saw Brittany as someone they could go to for help with school work, friends, or any other need. We can proudly say that in life and in death, our daughter, Brittany Ruth Oakley, made a difference in many, many lives.

Dealing with Grief

Website Feature

The Facebook logo, consisting of the word "facebook" in white lowercase letters on a blue rectangular background.

Most people are familiar with the social networking site Facebook. Like numerous other organizations across the country, Carolina Donor Services has created its own fan page to help those affected by donation and transplantation in its service area feel connected. The fan page offers facts on donation, event information, and sometimes even prize giveaways. Soon, it will also feature spotlights on volunteers and donor families. Become a fan today at www.facebook.com/CarolinaDonorServices.

Celebrating lives lost during holidays

Holidays mark a time of community and sharing, which can feel empty without the presence of a loved one. This is especially true when enjoying favorite meals or giving gifts. What can one do to help honor their loved one during this time?

Spend time doing something for others. Volunteer at a local homeless shelter or soup kitchen. Visit elderly care facilities, childcare centers or those who are ill. Use the money that you would have bought presents for a loved one to purchase a gift for a child at a local toy drive or donate the money to a charity.

Decorating doesn't have to be limited to the home. If you have the opportunity and desire, you can decorate your loved one's memorial site at the cemetery or other final resting place. This can be helpful in remembering your loved one's life during this time of year and still bringing them in to the seasonal celebrations.

Write a letter to your loved one letting them know how you are feeling with their absence during this time. You may decide to place it in a book, leave it at their memorial site, throw it away or even burn it. This will allow you to unload some of those more challenging emotions that may be difficult to speak to others and give you a direct connection to the person you miss.

Grief and the Holidays

While the holidays can be filled with laughter, joy and family, it can often be challenging to face this time of the year after losing a loved one. You may not feel like celebrating traditions or other holiday rituals; you may not feel like socializing with your family and friends, especially during the first holiday season after your loss.

How can you help yourself and your loved ones during this difficult time? First, make a decision for yourself on how much you would like to do for the holiday season. If you normally prepare the family dinner and don't feel that it a task you can take on this year, let your family know. If you celebrate the holidays at a particular location, you may decide to continue holding the festivities there or you may want to move it elsewhere. You can certainly make changes if they feel comfortable for you.

Second, don't be afraid to express your feelings. Your grief may be stronger or more intense than it has been before. This could include feelings of anger, panic, despair, guilt, depression and loneliness. Expressing your emotions through physical reactions (i.e. tears) or through activities (journaling, singing) can help.

Third, ask for and accept help when desired. While some people try to endure their struggles independently, they often find themselves in more difficult positions. This can cause prolonged grief and unnecessary pain. Friends, co-workers, or members of the congregation often want to help, especially during the holiday season, but are not sure of the first step. You can ask them for help baking, decorating the house, or just listening to your stories. It can be challenging for people to know how much you want to talk about your grief; if you are direct with them, they can be much more responsive.

Finally, be kind to yourself. Rest when needed as the emotional toll may be strong. If you are finding this holiday season particularly challenging, remember that bereaved families do come to enjoy the holidays again. It may not be this year, but it will certainly happen in the future. Also, don't be afraid to laugh and find joy in the holiday season. Celebrate your loved ones that are there as well as gone.

Share your thoughts...

If you would like to share your loved ones' story or have other suggestions for this newsletter, please contact the Life Anew Program Coordinator at Carolina Donor Services. Call (800) 200-2672 or email us at lifanew@carolinadonorservices.org.

