

SANDRA MUVDI

Jessica June
Children's Cancer
Foundation

By Stu Opperman

Mhe Fort Lauderdale woman was the mother of an active, precocious 7-year-old, Jessica June, when, in October 2003, she took her daughter to the doctor with what seemed to be flu-like symptoms. The diagnosis, however, was much worse: acute myelogenous leukemia, a rare and aggressive form of blood cancer. By that evening, little Jessica was in a coma and would never regain consciousness. Days later she was removed from life support. Jessica June Eiler would spend only four nights in the hospital before passing away.

Grief is a very personal emotion, paralyzing some and empowering others. For Sandra Muvdi, it was the latter. Just seven months after her daughter's tragic death, Muvdi created the *Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation* (JJCCF). The nonprofit organization (www.jjccf.org), which provides financial assistance to parents struggling financially as a result of their child's battle with cancer, was Muvdi's way of honoring a young girl's memory while giving a mother a new reason to live.

"I had lost my purpose in life after Jessica's death, even wondering if I should still be considered a mother," says Muvdi, a former banker and teacher who had no experience in the nonprofit world before starting her own foundation. "Helping others provides a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. I feel it's my calling."

When a child is diagnosed with cancer, Muvdi says, the family is put in an immediate financial bind because jobs are often lost when parents become full-time caregivers. JJCCF offers temporary assistance, paying outstanding bills for "basic human necessities." Upon learning that a single mom and her daughter were waiting on public transportation to get to doctors' appointments,



Muvdi worked as an advocate with media partner WPLG-TV and its "Local 10 Care Force" (www.local10careforce.com) to get Aida Bernal and 3-year-old Zuyani a car. Reporter Mayte Padron often works with Muvdi, soliciting donations from viewers to aid underprivileged children fighting cancer in South Florida.

The Bernals are one of 35 local families who have been assisted by Muvdi's foundation in 2008, outreach she says wouldn't be possible without *The Wasie Foundation*. The Fort Lauderdale-based philanthropic organization (www.wasie.org) has provided grant funds to the *Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation* and has taken Muvdi under its wing to maximize impact in the community.

"We support the *Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation* because we have seen countless examples of its positive impact," says Gregg D. Sjoquist, president/CEO of *The Wasie Foundation*. "It is a financial 'life-saver' for parents who are rightfully focused on their child's health and helping them through this awful time in their lives."

Sjoquist has also taken on a mentor role with Muvdi, sharing his years of nonprofit expertise in the true spirit of philanthropy. "Gregg is amazing and his knowledge invaluable to our efforts," says Muvdi. "He has supported me in so many ways - board member, donor, volunteer - but most of all as a true friend."

How successful is JJCCF at raising cancer awareness to school-aged children and teens? Just ask the kids a Virginia Shuman Young Elementary who just recently experienced their first Cancer Awareness Program that raised over \$3,000. To wrap up the month-long program children and teachers all wore their tee shirts and buttons to encourage solidarity and support for cancer victims. Cute as a button.... just like Jessica!-DUO

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