

Making hearts soar

Event puts focus on Childhood Cancer Awareness Month.

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CHILDHOOD CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Children with cancer get a chance to fly high

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If the career in the Air Force he may someday pursue doesn't pan out, Josue Cruz has the makings of a motivational speaker.

When asked what advice he'd offer children with cancer, 11-year-old Josue says, "Be strong. Be brave. Everything happens for a purpose. Through every situation, you need to make the best of it."

He was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma, a cancer of the immune system, at age 9.

Today, Josue is in remission and maintains a sunny disposition that was on full display Saturday morning when he, along with 10 other kids who have been diagnosed with various forms of cancer, soared into the sky on water jetpacks at Jungle Island.

A day of fun meant to reward young cancer patients ages 3 to 11, as well as shine a light on Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, Saturday's event at the Miami causeway attraction was a result of a partnership between Jungle Island, Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation and AquaJet Mia-

mi.

"We feel proud to be able to fly these kids and share this experience with them," said Geoffrey Lardy, the founder of AquaJet Miami.

RESPITE FOR FAMILIES

The event, said Sandra Muvdi, founder of Jessica June, was a respite for the kids and their families, all of whom the nonprofit organization assisted.

The Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation works closely with South Florida hospitals to locate families of childhood-cancer patients who need financial support. The organization provides families with checks or vouchers that are used toward rent, groceries, utility bills, car payments and other such "basic human necessities," as Muvdi put it.

"We can relieve their financial crisis so they can focus on what's really important, which is their child's cancer and their survival," she said.

An invitation to Saturday's event was extended to all of Jessica June's beneficiary families, but criteria were established to ensure the children's safety.

All participants had to



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Mackenzy Bowling, 8, of Plantation, enjoys the ride on an AquaJet controlled by master jetpack pilot Amber Hookway on Saturday off Parrot Cove at Jungle Island in Miami. Mackenzy has received chemotherapy for leukemia, now in remission.

be under 12 and in remission — both necessary to fully enjoy the thrill of a tandem jetpack ride, which straps participants to an adult instructor and zooms them up to 20 feet in the air at close to 25 miles per hour.

EAGER TO SOAR AGAIN

"The most rewarding thing is their smiles," Lardy said.

Dimples dotting each cheek, Mackenzy Bowling was among the throng of smiles, begging for another

go on the jetpack.

Just three months ago, Bowling, who celebrated her 8th birthday on Sept. 10, was receiving chemotherapy treatment for leukemia, a cancer of the blood cells, said her mother, Nataly Santana.

Mackenzy is now in remission, and come December, doctors at Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital in Hollywood will remove her port, a medical device the size of a quarter that is used to obtain blood samples and

inject medicine.

Santana said she looks forward to ringing in the new year with her healthy daughter and her two sons, Steven and Lucas.

As for Josue Cruz, he had a few final words of wisdom to share before running off to play with his 6-year-old brother, Caleb.

"Life is hard, and sometimes you go through hard stuff," he said, gazing out at the water. "But if you make the best of it, you could make it good."



Josue Cruz, 11, of Cooper City, descends an inflatable slide at Parrot Cove at Jungle Island. Earlier, he soared on an AquaJet.