

# Local



SARAH DUSSAULT/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation is helping Davaxha Trollinger and her family. Davaxha, 12, center, has a brain tumor. Davaxha and sister Aryel, 8, left, are cared for by their grandmother, Marjorie Johnson, 50, right.

## Family gets a lifeline

By ERIKA PESANTES  
Staff writer



LAUDERDALE LAKES — There is 12-year-old Davaxha Trollinger's colorful exterior: hot-pink threads woven through her hair and a tie-dye dress. And then there's the dark and grim reality of a growing brain tumor beneath that.

Davaxha was born with neurofibromatosis type 1, a genetic disorder that has caused complications, including tumors behind her eyes, at the base of her spine and in her brain.

Two years ago, the pre-teen's illness began manifesting itself physically: her right hand gradually curled inward, the tendons in her right foot tightened so much she began to walk on tip-toes and her mouth drooped with partial paralysis.

In August, the Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation stepped in to offer \$2,500 in financial assistance

to Davaxha and her family for basic needs such as rent, car insurance and groceries.

The agency is among dozens of nonprofit groups supported by the Sun Sentinel Children's Fund.

"Believe me, I was so happy. I didn't know where my rent was going to come from," said Davaxha's grandmother, Marjorie Johnson. "It's like you're drowning and someone's thrown a lifeline. That's how it felt."

The cancer foundation is affiliated

See AID, 4B



SARAH DUSSAULT/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Aryel and Davaxha Trollinger are delighted with their Christmas tree — a post-Thanksgiving surprise from their grandmother.

### AID

Continued from Page 1B

with seven hospitals in South Florida and is headquartered inside the Broward Health Medical Center in Fort Lauderdale. The hospitals refer children with cancer to the agency.

Since its launch in 2004, about 400 children and their families have received financial help, said founder Sandra Muvdi.

Muvdi, who lost her young daughter Jessica to a rare form of leukemia, says that caregivers should be able to focus on their children's treatment without worrying about making ends meet.

"They're desperate ... in a situation where they're going to be homeless, going to lose their electricity," Muvdi said, "These are families that are trying to focus on something so important, which is their child's survival."

Johnson, 50, gained legal custody of Davaxha and her 8-year-old sister Aryel in August. She assumed the role of primary caretaker after the girls' mother nearly lost them to state custody because of her drug use, said Johnson, a cafeteria worker with the Broward County School District.

Davaxha undergoes chemotherapy weekly to encourage the brain tumor to shrink, but so far it hasn't.

On the Friday after Thanksgiving, Johnson surprised her granddaughters with a pre-lit Christmas tree, but they were initially more excited about the small tank she also brought home for their pet turtle, Tiana Terry.

It's those simple things that bring a smile to Davaxha's face. She hopes the classmates at Plantation Middle School who tease her can instead take the time to learn about her condition, she said.

"I want people and kids to know about me and my story," a shy Davaxha said. "I'm a good person and I have a good heart. That's how my mom raised me."