



Mission Critical: Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation

By Patsy Mennuti
Photography by Lisa Nalven

"Hearing the word 'cancer' is the most devastating word to hear in the world," said Aida Bernal, mother of three-year-old Zuyani, diagnosed with liver cancer in 2006. When she heard the news, her reaction was, "She's so small, and my world dropped. I was devastated."



Jessica June
Children's Cancer
Foundation

whose kids have been stricken with cancer—financially, emotionally and as an advocate. "I knew from my own personal experience with Jessie that when your child is diagnosed with cancer, your life immediately turns upside down. In addition to facing a medical crisis, many families experience a financial crisis," said Muvdi.

Muvdi continued, "A child requires a full-time caregiver while receiving cancer treatment. This situation leads to the elimination of a parent's income, which in turn creates a financial crisis for these families. So then the question is: 'Who will provide basic human necessities while a parent is out of work?'"

This crisis becomes particularly acute in homes where there is only one parent caregiver. "I strongly believe people in our community should be aware of what these children/families experience and their severe needs," Muvdi said.

The Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation (JJCCF) provides assistance with basic human necessities to underprivileged children fighting cancer in South Florida and advocates on their behalf. Children fighting cancer in the community are often without food, electricity, medical care or even a roof over their heads. The Foundation provides assistance with outstanding bills such as medical, utility, rent payment, mortgage and grocery gift certificates, which becomes vital to the survival of these children while they receive cancer treatment.

The initial shock from Zuyani's diagnosis, the stress from the loss of her family business and the overwhelming financial responsibilities aligned for a perfect storm of catastrophes for this single mother. And then Bernal found Sandra Muvdi, founder of the Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation.

Muvdi's seven-year-old daughter (and only child), Jessica June, died rather suddenly of Acute Myelogenous Leukemia, an aggressive form of blood cancer, in October of 2003. Grief is a powerful emotion that elicits any number of powerful reactions on the bearer. Muvdi reacted to her own situation almost immediately with ferocity and focus, following a calling to help families

For Bernal and the scores of families that JJCCF has assisted, Muvdi is an angel. "I do not have the words to explain what Sandra has done for me. She didn't even know me, and she helped me. She's an awesome person. You don't think that there are good people out there to help you, but there are. She tries in any way to accommodate me and help me. Just when one door closed, another opened."

Muvdi noted the continued success of the Foundation based on the community's heartfelt response to families' needs. "As advocates, we have been featured on Channel 4 'Neighbors 4 Neighbors', Channel 10 'Local 10 Care Force', Comcast Newsmakers and in the Sun-Sentinel, which has brought much needed additional financial assistance to the children and families from contributors in our community," Muvdi said. Her annual Fancy Jeans event has grown in popularity and support, and the foundation recently received a grant from the Community Foundation of Broward through the Harold D. Franks Cancer Fund that, in addition to several other major gifts, will provide double the assistance to children in need fighting cancer in South Florida.

To find out more about the Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation, to make a charitable contribution or to learn how you can volunteer, call (954) 593-5603, or visit www.jjccf.org.

Right page:
Zuyani and Aida Bernal

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