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Spotlight

Mom channels grief into comforting others

Candice Williams / The Detroit News

After the death of her 5-year-old daughter, Leah, from an incurable brain tumor last August, Karen James promised that she would do something to honor her memory.

The Livonia resident is turning her pain into purpose with the recent formation of nonprofit Leah's Happy Hearts -- named for the times when Leah would say her heart was happy.

"With all this grief I felt I had to do something as a way to help me cope," said James, 48. "So many people came out in support of us in some way and I felt it was my time to give back.

"Leah was such an inspiration because she always said my heart's happy right until the very end. So I'd like to share her spirit with others."

James is working with friends who serve as the nonprofit's board of directors. Her mission is to bring comfort to families whose children suffer from life-threatening illnesses. She plans to donate to the parent support group at C.S. Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor and host events for ill children.

"There will be events that will bring smiles to the children's faces and make their hearts happy even if for only a couple of hours," she said. "These children are poked and prodded and go through so much. I've seen it for myself. It's so tiring for them."

A portion of the money raised through the organization will go to support research at the Pediatric Brain Tumor Foundation. Pediatric brain tumors are the No. 1 cause of cancer death among children, according to the foundation.

"People don't know that," James said. "I just don't think enough research is being done. All of these children are diagnosed with brain tumors and most of the time the parents are sent home with a 1 to 10 percent chance of the child living past a year."

To drum up donations, James had silicone

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John T. Greilick / The Detroit News

Each bracelet features two smiling hearts, which was artwork by Leah, above.
[See full image](#)

To get involved

For information, visit www.leahshappyhearts.org.

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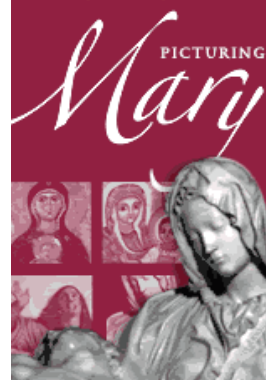
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rubber bracelets made in Leah's favorite color, purple. Each is imprinted with the organization's name and features Leah's artwork: two smiling hearts.

James hopes to bring in additional funds by holding a silent auction in the spring.


Anne Doulette, a neighbor and vice president of Leah's Happy Hearts, said James, her husband, Phil, and daughter Kylie, 10, have demonstrated strength when dealing with the situation.

"For her to put her energy toward something is good for her," she said.

You can reach Candice Williams at (517) 552-5504 or cwilliams@detnews.com.

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