

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)

Personal choices inspire campus to donate

Eastern a top winner in the Donate Life Challenge

By: James Roedl/Staff Reporter

Posted: 12/11/09

Eastern won the 2009 Donate Life Illinois Campus Challenge by registering 205 organ donors.

Cameron Chana died in a tragic bus accident last summer, two weeks after he graduated from Eastern. His organs saved the lives of recipients who had no other option, but to receive a transplant. While the campus challenge tries to register potential donors who have not considered donation before, Chana took the time to become a donor well before he died. His story helped inspire students, Jordan Cox, junior communication studies major, to win the Donate Life Illinois Campus Challenge.

"So many students at Eastern became so passionate about organ donation after hearing about Cameron Chana's story, and I felt that an organ donation registration drive would be a great way to get students involved for a great cause," said Cox, who helped register donors.

Cox said she loved the idea of an organ donor drive knowing how much it can help others.

"Organ donation is something that can affect anyone's life in a split second so to see so many different people from all different cultures and communities to come out and support this great cause made it all worth it," Cox said.

Carissa Coon, a senior accounting major, organized Eastern's campus challenge.

"I didn't expect the response that I did receive," she said. "I was overwhelmed and amazed by how much support not only the campaign received, but how much personal support I received as well."

When the challenge started, Coon's brother had been on the transplant list for six weeks waiting for a heart and kidney.

"I knew that the people that I registered wouldn't help my brother directly, but I hope that one day that person can help someone else," Coon said. "I just didn't want anyone else or their family to experience and deal with what mine had to go through."

Coon said many people know some one who has been affected by organ donation. "In a way it affects everyone since we all have the option to become donors," she said. "One donor can help save or enhance the lives of up to 25 people, so why would you not want to help."

According to the United Network for Organ Sharing, 105,255 people in America are waiting for organs as of Thursday morning. Between January and September, 21,422 transplants took place, and there were 10,916 donors. Michelle Schnepfer, an Eastern alumna who graduated from the family

consumer sciences program in 2002, personally knows about the need for transplants. Schnepfer had a normal pregnancy, but her daughter Macie was born prematurely. Her daughter had come home with a clean bill of health, but went into cardiac arrest at three months old. Schnepfer and her husband brought Macie home, but felt some thing was not right. They took her to a hospital in St. Louis where she underwent cardiac arrest again. At 5 a.m., Schnepfer was told that her daughter would receive a new heart. By 7:30 the next morning, Macie had a new heart and was doing well. The heart had come from a child called Destiny. The child's mother chose not to identify herself, but asked for updates on Macie.

Schnepfer is happy to send photos, and updates every six months.

Macie will stay away from malls, and stores for now to avoid getting sick, but she will live a normal life. Schnepfer says there no activity restrictions and Macie will be able participate in sports and anything else she wants to.

While Coon said some people did not want to register to become donors, Schnepfer feels she has a reason everyone should consider it.

"Listen to Macie's story, just take a look at her, and then their decision is their own," Schnepfer said.

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