



For immediate release

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Edward Hospital Nurse Honors Son with Gifts for Donor Families
Donor Parent Offerings Aim to Comfort Loved Ones During Time of Loss

ITASCA, Ill. (October 14, 2011) – Simple comfort. That’s what Jill Zuleg, RN, needed that day in October 2010. Her 16-year-old son Kyle was declared brain dead after a falling tree limb struck him while playing during a camping trip. Zuleg and her husband chose to donate Kyle’s organs and tissue, and his gifts ultimately gave life to five people.

As donation professionals searched the national database to match her son’s organs to people awaiting transplants, Zuleg, a nurse at Edward Hospital and Health Services in Naperville, craved warmth. And needed nourishment. But she was reluctant to leave the bedside, cherishing every last moment she’d have with her son. She vowed then to save others from experiencing the same situation she did by offering simple gifts of comfort during the donation process.

A year later, Zuleg has made good on her vow by forming the Kyle Zuleg Foundation. “One objective of the foundation is to care for families of organ donors,” Zuleg explained. “Because I’m a nurse with Edward Hospital, which partners with Gift of Hope to make donation possible, it was a natural fit to work with the hospital to honor Kyle by comforting grieving families.”

That comfort takes the form of warm blankets and food baskets for family members sitting bedside as the donation process takes its course. The blankets display a special design that pays tribute to Kyle and honors his legacy. “We thought it would be nice to have soft blankets available while people sit with their loved ones,” Zuleg said. “It’s something comforting to just cuddle up next to them and be with them. ”

A feeling of comfort is important as families wait while the organ “match” process plays out, Zuleg said. Families have a lot of “think time” during that period, she explained, and she and her husband considered changing their minds and withdrawing consent several times as they waited for word on matches for Kyle’s organs. But knowing what they know now about donation and the lifesaving benefits it gives to people in need, they would have deeply regretted withdrawing consent, Zuleg said.

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“That’s an important lesson we want to share through the foundation. While we want to make the experience of donation better for families, we also want to prevent a family from having the same thoughts we did and changing their mind about donation. We felt it was the right decision from the start. And knowing now that Kyle gave life to five people, we’re definitely sure it was.”

The foundation distributed its first blanket and basket to a donor family in September. “Starting the foundation and creating the blanket have been immensely helpful to us,” Zuleg said. “I can’t change the path we’ve been forced to follow. I can only take the bad and turn it into something good, choose to go forward and choose to honor Kyle and the hero that he is.”

Zuleg hopes to implement the program in other hospitals throughout the state. “Kyle’s life and legacy shine on,” she said. “We want him to shine on throughout Illinois.”

Donate Life Illinois is a coalition of agencies responsible for organ, tissue, eye, blood and marrow donation, as well as donor education and registration, in Illinois. It is one of 45 regional coalitions and 50 national businesses or associations making up Donate Life America, a not-for-profit alliance that serves as a national voice and inspires all people to save and enhance lives through organ, eye and tissue donation.

To learn more about organ, tissue, eye and blood donation, or to register to be a donor, visit DonateLifeIllinois.org.

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