

How has living with your or your loved one's leukemia affected your education?

Living with Leukemia has given me a drive to overcome my circumstances, and it gave me direction with respect to my career and life goal, which is to make a difference in the lives of children battling cancer. I plan to be a Pediatric Oncology Nurse Practitioner. This has been my goal since 2011. When I was 9 years old, I was diagnosed with high-risk Leukemia. I went through 2.5 years of chemotherapy, and along the way developed several complications. During treatment for cancer, I developed type one diabetes, celiac disease and hypothyroidism. I had multiple life-threatening reactions to my medications, resulting in medevac and ambulance trips. It has been a long and challenging road, but what defines me is not the setbacks, but my determination and ability to overcome them. When I was going through treatment for cancer, my Nurse Practitioner and Oncology nurses made a huge difference in my life. They didn't just treat me medically, they comforted me, calmed me down when I was scared, and listened to me thoughtfully when I needed to be heard. I knew at that time, that my calling was to do what they were doing. It was at that time, fourth grade, that I started preparing. I was unable to attend school that year due to treatment and needing to be at the hospital for most of the school year, so I used a tutor, who taught me everything she could no matter where I was. I got through 4th grade. My 5th grade year, as well as all of my middle school years were a challenge. My treatment continued through 7th grade, but I was determined not to fall behind, because I wanted to enter high school being able to take AP science classes and to be able to get into our high school's technology center medical program. But beyond preparing academically, I already felt called to help other kids battling cancer. So my family and I started volunteering anytime we could to help other families going through what I had just been through. Every year we volunteer at the Claire's Cup, a soccer tournament that our soccer club created for me when I was first diagnosed, and continues to hold every year to help a family who's child is battling a life-threatening illness. I'm honored to help keep the tournament's tradition going every year, and love helping other families. My family and I also started going to the D.C. Ronald McDonald House and making meals for the families staying there. It felt like I had a purpose and the path for my future was becoming more clear every day – to help kids battling cancer. Once I got to high school, I was really able to start connecting my college and career goals with the activities I'd do to achieve those goals. I was able to take Honors and AP science classes, and I was accepted into our high school's technology and career center where I participated in the Allied Health Program's Human Anatomy elective class. This course provided me the opportunity to participate in clinicals at St. Mary's Hospital and gain hands-on experience in a medical environment. I also continued my cancer-focused community service work. It has been an exciting time for me, as I've realized the path I saw for myself at 9 years old was definitely the one I was meant for. Throughout my high school years, I've gotten calls from several local families whose young children had been diagnosed with cancer. They'd ask me to meet with their kids for encouragement, and with the help of my family, we found creative ways to bring comfort and cheer to them during a very difficult time. My favorite way to cheer these kids up has been to give them puppy visits. We find local friends with puppies and take them to the kids for visits. It's been my fail-proof way of giving comfort. Helping these kids has cemented in me that this is my future. But I not only want to comfort them, I want to help them to get better. I want to be the person responsible for treating them. The Oncologist I related to the most during my treatment was the doctor who was also a cancer survivor. It comforted me to have someone treating me who knew what I was going through, and who made it thru herself. She was an inspiration to me and I want to be that inspiration to as many kids as I can.