

## LOMA LINDA: Memorial walk raises funds for children with cancer

10:00 PM PDT on Thursday, September 8, 2011

CHILDHOOD CANCER FOUNDATION OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

The most devastating news parents can get is confirmation that their child has cancer, a disease that kills more children than cystic fibrosis, muscular dystrophy, AIDS, asthma and juvenile diabetes combined, according to the National Cancer Institute.

With that in mind, the Childhood Cancer Foundation of Southern California will hold a memorial walk Sunday in Loma Linda to raise money to help families who are coping with a child's cancer. More than 400 people are expected to participate.

Dalia Gonzalez knows what it feels like to hear that her own child has cancer. Two years ago, her 7-year-old daughter, Violeta, was diagnosed with leukemia.

Soon after the diagnosis from an oncologist at Loma Linda University Children's Hospital, Gonzalez was greeted by representatives of the Childhood Cancer Foundation, a Loma Linda-based nonprofit organization that puts people like Gonzalez in touch with other families who have endured similar ordeals.

The group also provides patients with helpful information, books and even financial assistance for food and gasoline costs as they struggle to pay for cancer treatment.

"The foundation gave us both emotional and economic support," said Gonzalez, whose family lives in Barstow. "It meant a great deal to me to have them put us in touch with other parents who were going through the same thing. It made us feel like we weren't alone."

The foundation also organizes social gatherings and special events to bolster families' emotional strength and provide support they need to get through the physical and emotional challenges.

The gathering Sunday, the foundation's largest public event of the year, is the 12th annual Brianna Cadman Memorial Kids Walk, named in honor of a 12-year-old girl who lost her battle against cancer in 1999.

Inland families, residents and supporters are expected to participate in the walk, which will begin at the foundation's office at 11155 Mountain View Ave., Loma Linda, and continue to Loma Linda University Children's Hospital.

Walkers will carry homemade banners, photos and other personal items in honor of children who are battling cancer as well as children who have lost their lives. Many participants will sing songs and shout cheers in support of their children.

"It is a very moving and powerful event," said Armida Kersey, the foundation's executive director, who noted that cancer has a ripple effect that engulfs entire families.

Kersey takes photographs of each family that has been affected by the disease, so they can remember their participation in the event and draw emotional strength from it.

"They incorporate the whole family in the event because they understand that it's not just one person who is experiencing cancer. It's the whole family," said Louise Ramirez, a Bloomington resident and past Kids Walk participant. Her 10-year-old daughter, Raquel, was diagnosed with leukemia four years ago.

Prizes are awarded after the walk to the youngest participant -- whether they're walking, being carried or in a stroller -- and to the families with the loudest cheers. Prizes also go to the families who raise the most donations.

Kids Walk proceeds are used to provide information and support to Inland families.

Resources provided include a children's book called "Chemo Crazy," which explains what children will be experiencing as they undergo chemotherapy and other cancer treatments. "It's a great resource because it explains everything families should be prepared for," Kersey said.

Money raised at the walk also pays for birthday and holiday gifts for children with cancer

and, for their families' gasoline vouchers and groceries.

"Everything we raise goes back to the families," Kersey said.

Beyond that, Kersey said she hopes the Kids Walk will raise community awareness about cancer and encourage families to emphasize early detection, which is key in saving the lives of young people battling this disease.

Another fundraiser -- a wine-tasting event -- is planned from 6 to 9 p.m. Oct. 1 at the historic Hofer Ranch in Ontario.

Information about the Kids Walk, which is open to the public, and the wine event, which will include a live band, food competition as well as live and silent auctions, is available at [www.ccsocal.org](http://www.ccsocal.org).

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