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Christian Academy kidney recipient donates time to help others

By TARA HETTINGER

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— On this cold, February day, Christian Academy of Indiana was closed. The halls were empty, dark and quiet. No one was in sight. But inside one classroom, a student sat busily wrapping toys. That student, Sarah Boesing, 18, of New Albany, came in on her day off from school to finish putting together care packages for children and their parents.

This is part of Break the Gray, a project Boesing started more than two years ago to reach out to those dealing with chronic disease at Kosair and Riley children's hospitals. "We just want to encourage and support them and let them know they're not forgotten," she said while placing a final piece of tape on the tissue paper, concealing the toys inside.

She knows what they are going through, because she was there not long ago. Since birth, Boesing has suffered with kidney problems. By the time she was 11, she was told she had six months to live if she didn't get a kidney transplant or start dialysis. Neither of her parents had the same blood type as Boesing, and her siblings were too young to be considered as possible donors. Within just a few months, a donor was found. A fellow church member, Susan Botts, of New Albany, heard Boesing's story, got tested and found out she was a perfect match. Boesing had the transplant and went home a day before turning 12. However, her battle was far from over. Just months later, Boesing's body started to reject the new kidney. After having multiple kidney infections, doctors removed her two original kidneys, leaving just the donated one.

During that time, doctors gave Boesing medication to suppress her immune system. The goal was to stop her body from rejecting the kidney. It worked too well, she said. "My immune system doesn't work like it should now," Boesing said. "It will likely never repair itself." So, every week the teenager has to inject herself with antibodies — a process that takes one to two hours.

Even while going through all of that, Boesing makes time to collect donations for Break the Gray, organize them and distribute them to those who need something to cheer them up. "Another side people don't often see of chronic disease is the emotional side," she said. "That's sometimes worse than the physical side." That's the reason she started this project. She said the winter months can be especially hard for those in the hospital. She said the cold, gray days can make the situation even worse. So, she decided to throw a party for them.

Every year, she stops by the same place where she spent much of her childhood: 7 West, the pediatric kidney and oncology unit at Kosair Children's Hospital in Louisville. She brings treats and hands out gifts to the children and their parents.

"The parents are usually left out, but it is really hard on the parents," she said. "It maybe even harder on them than others, because they have to watch their kids go through everything."

With the donations rolling in every year, Boesing decided to expand her outreach to include Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis. "I had no clue what I was doing when I started this," she said, laughing. "Now, years later, I still don't, but I try to look like I do."

Boesing feels as if this is her calling. "Sometimes God has us go through stuff so that we can comfort others going through the same things," she said. Boesing plans to go to college for pediatric oncology. As for the program, Boesing said she hopes the underclassmen keep it alive. "I hope that they'll continue it," she said. "My ultimate dream job would be to turn it into a nonprofit organization."

Her work has also gotten her recognized statewide. Boesing was named one of the Distinguished Finalists in the 2008 Prudential Spirit of Community Awards.

Christian Academy of Indiana senior Sarah Boesing wraps presents for children diagnosed with cancer Friday morning inside a classroom at the school. Boesing will deliver the gifts to children in the cancer ward at Riley Children's Hospital in Indianapolis. Staff photo by Kevin McGloshen



Boesing has also prepared baskets for the parents of children diagnosed with cancer containing bibles, coffee and teas. The project is organized through the ministry that Boesing created, Break The Grace. Staff photo by Kevin McGloshen

