

# There's a little fighter who needs you **in their corner!!**

*Families and children diagnosed with cancer rely on the support and assistance of non-profit organisations to help them during this traumatic time.*

**T**he Little Fighters Cancer Trust is a small, underfunded charity operating from rented premises in the Boland town of Paarl. With a total of three staff members, the trust provides support to children with cancer and their families nationally. The trust was registered as a non-profit organisation (NPO) and PBO (public benefit organisation) in 2010.

The initial aim of the trust was to assist children with cancer in the Drakenstein area, however, soon families from across the country heard about this small but very active and truly unique organisation and requests for help came flooding in. Living up to their one and only promise "We will do whatever is within our means and ability to assist," the trust has grown into a national childhood cancer support organisation delivering unique assistance and support in all nine provinces.

According to Mandie Erasmus, spokesperson for the trust, it is passion and dedication that drives their operations. "Believe me, once you see a child fighting cancer, you cannot rest, you cannot keep quiet. You constantly want to do more, you realise very quickly that your own life is filled with so many blessings, and you learn to be grateful for things as simple as a crust of bread.

"No parent is ever prepared to hear the words 'Your child has cancer'. We meet most of the parents shortly after they have heard these words, when they are dazed, confused and heartbroken. The first conversation with a newly diagnosed child's parents is something that takes a bit of mental preparation and a few deep breaths. Nothing you say will be what they so dearly want to hear: that there has been a mistake, and their child is fine.

"Instead, you tentatively start a conversation, knowing deep in your heart that the possibility is quite real that these parent's lives will soon start falling apart."

## Devastating consequences

In most cases, the mother of the child diagnosed with cancer ends up quitting her employment. Few employers will pay a staff member who is at her sick child's bedside for weeks or months on end. In 90% of families, the loss of income immediately has severe consequences. It becomes difficult to pay the rent, put food on the table, provide for the needs of siblings, and even get to and from the hospital. Families often lose their homes, their vehicles or get torn apart, and the pressure and stress is relentless. An ill child may need nutritional supplements, an expensive change of diet, may even need to start wearing diapers again and often lose a limb(s), requiring a prosthesis or other medical equipment. The list of needs is endless.

"With less income and greater expense, the wheels come off for most families, and this is where the Little Fighters Cancer Trust steps in," explains Mandie. "It is not possible to pinpoint exactly what we do. Every child's and every family's needs are different and extremely varied. It is correct to say though, that there is nothing we won't do for a child fighting cancer and their family if we have the resources to do so."

## Two main focus areas

The trust's work can be divided into two main areas.

Firstly, the hospital support projects. The trust has extended these projects to 12 of the 19 paediatric oncology treatment centres in South Africa. "We would love to reach them all, but we need more



funding. However, when we implement our projects we always include the outpatient clinics and day rooms, so that we reach not only the children in the wards, but also those coming in only for the day for treatment, tests, or check-ups. We reach up to 1 500 children with every hospital project," Mandie says.

Hospital projects include:

- Christmas
- Mother's Day
- Get Wrapped (distributing new, warm, and fluffy blankets during winter)
- Bag of Hope
- Adhoc projects such as ward birthday parties (on each child's birthday, a full-on party with cake, gifts and trimmings is organised); pizza parties for a little break from hospital food; delivering pyjamas; toiletries; nappies; clothing; educational toys; and treats and spoils.

The trust works closely with social workers in the ward who also contact the trust directly if there is a specific need, or a family that needs assistance that the hospital might not be able to provide. For example, if a child can go home, but will not be discharged by the treating oncologist if there is not a bed at home for the child.

If the trust receives this type of request, it will deliver a bed to wherever the child lives in South Africa. Usually, families referred by hospitals, will be added to the trust's individually supported families.

The second area of focus is individual family support. According to Mandie, the families that fall outside of the hospital support project are assisted according to their and the child with cancer's individual needs. "We provide many a childhood cancer family with monthly groceries, toiletries, and cleaning materials. We also provide clothing, bedding, wheelchairs, mobility aids, nutritional supplements and diapers to ensure that the family has what they need for the child fighting cancer.

"Not only do we ensure that the diagnosed child can be taken care of, but we also make sure the siblings have school bags, uniforms and meals. And, whenever we do any kind of gifting or outings, the siblings are always included. When and where we can, we also take families on outings or hold special events where they can just have a normal day and enjoy something together as a family. Many families crack under the constant strain of having an ill child, and we do what we can to lessen the pressure so that family bonds are retained and families stay together," Mandie states.

The Little Fighters Cancer Trust also makes last wishes come true by fulfilling the little fighter's greatest wish thereby creating precious memories that will outlast the dreaded disease itself and providing the family with special quality time together.

### Little Fighters needs your help

The trust relies totally on public funding, donations and sponsorships. As a registered NPO with PBO status, and a

Level 1 B-BBEE Contributor with 135% procurement, its financial audits are open to the public. The trust prides itself on its transparent and professional financial management.

There are numerous ways in which you can support the invaluable work of the trust:

- Subscribe to the trust's SMS line, and make a R10 weekly donation. SMS "LFCANCER" to 31222 to subscribe. To unsubscribe, SMS "STOP" to 31222.
- Donate your pre-loved household and clothing items to the Pre-Loved Charity Shoppe. Donated items are sold to raise funds, which are then utilised in the hospital support projects and individual family support programme. The trust will also collect sizeable pre-loved collections from anywhere in South Africa, and invites individuals, schools, businesses, and clubs to do such drives on its behalf.
- Make a financial contribution. Everything the trust does, is done with love, but must be paid for with real money. Financial contributions can be deposited or EFT'd to: LITTLE FIGHTERS CANCER TRUST | FNB | CHEQUE ACCOUNT 62380183013 | PAARL MALL BRANCH 250057
- Get your company on board as a CSI partner.
- Swim, run, climb a mountain, host an event, or raise funds for the trust in any other way by utilising any of the online fundraising platforms, designed to make it easy to dedicate your efforts to children fighting cancer.

In addition, please promote childhood cancer awareness, and remember that September is International Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, so GO GOLD! The gold awareness ribbon represents the 12 major types of childhood cancer, very much the same way as the pink awareness ribbon represents breast cancer.

For more information, please contact: mandie@littlefighters.org.za, call her on 021 870 1282/073 729 6155 or use the trust's website and social media platforms.

Website: [www.littlefighters.org.za](http://www.littlefighters.org.za)  
 Facebook: Little Fighters Cancer Trust NPO  
 Twitter: @LFCancer  
 Blog: [littlefighterscancertrust.wordpress.com](http://littlefighterscancertrust.wordpress.com)

