



# You are my sunshine

Foundation One Year On...

## The charity born from the heartbreak of childhood cancer has blossomed into something proud with promise.

Twelve months.... \$30,000 .... 5000 people. .... One little girl .... Those figures add up to the first, exceptional year of the You Are My Sunshine (YAMS) Foundation.

August 2008 saw the end of the battle for five and a half year-old Kahlilla Blyss Donahoo. She had been diagnosed in 2005 with neuroblastoma – a cancer that travels along the nervous system to create a tumour. It claims young lives, and it claimed hers.

Neuroblastoma is the most common solid malignancy in children not involving the brain. About 50 cases are diagnosed in Australia each year. It accounts for 6-10% of all childhood cancers and 15% of childhood cancer deaths, cancer being the leading cause of death in Australia of children aged 0-14. At present, even with aggressive chemotherapy, only about 25% of children with advanced neuroblastoma survive. However, if the disease is diagnosed early, the chances of survival are much higher.

Dr Paul Wood, paediatric oncologist at the Royal Children's Hospital, is undertaking research revolving around neuroblastoma. "Childhood Neuroblastoma is unique," he said. "If you can catch it early enough it can be cured. But if it's caught later, it's more difficult to cure and has devastating effects."

"It's associated with a certain type of cancer-causing gene which is also responsible for a wide range of malignancies – including adult malignancies. It is responsible for more than a million cancers worldwide a year, so any beneficial findings we get from this research can apply to a broad range of malignancies, including cancers in adults," he said.

The You Are My Sunshine (YAMS) Foundation was launched in Cowes on September 20, 2009. Named after Kahlilla's favourite song, "You

Are My Sunshine", the foundation's charter is to raise \$150,000 to fund research into a cure for neuroblastoma.

Westernport Water managing director Murray Jackson chairs the YAMS Foundation board whose trustees include Cowes accountant Simon Manning, Helen Foote from Stockdale and Leggo, Heather Patch from Fountainway, Kahlilla's grandmother Judi Donahoo, of Cowes and Judi's daughter Jess Donahoo. YAMS Foundation is in partnership with The Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) Foundation, Melbourne. All donations and funds raised are deposited with the RCH Foundation and distributed under the program of research agreed with the Trustees of YAMS Foundation.

After Kahlilla passed away, her Nan Judi and her Pop Kevin Donahoo decided to create a lasting memory of her by raising funds to tackle the disease. "I promised Lill before she died that I was going to fight this cruel thing," Judi said. Now almost two years on, the Phillip Island and Gippsland communities have embraced the story of a brave little girl's fight, and are working to raise funds for future research.

### ...\$30,000-PLUS...

That is the amount of funds raised through public donations and from a handful of special events. A recent golf day at Phillip Island attracted more than 100 players from as far afield as Yarram, Inverloch and Leongatha. They played golf and bid for a grab bag of prizes, including a personalised set of golf clubs, a personal donation by Murray Jackson to raise over \$8000.

Westernport Water has taken the lead in getting the foundation up and running – having organised the celebrity launch at the waterfront of Cowes last September. That event saw a hand-picked list of 80 invitees.



Another fund-raising event was the garden party, held in March amid threatening storm clouds, in the elegant setting of historic Glen Isla in Cowes. Wine sales and a silent auction saw that even defying the weather and raising almost \$4,000.

Then there have been the smaller-ticket events such as 'Feelgood Friday' where the foundation receives a dollar from every pot sold during happy hour at Nick Say's Westernport Hotel in San Remo. Drinking for a good cause – there's something to be said for it!

Westernport Water staff run regular fund raisers. Morning teas with scones created by Kahlilla's Nan Judi Donahoo are sell-outs. Kevin, and Kahlilla's dad Colin work in the engineering section of the water corporation. The link doesn't end there, either. One of their work colleagues David Bloomfield has introduced his Inverloch Lions Club to help support the foundation too. The Cowes IGA supermarket supports the foundation through its docket program, just quote number 161.

### ... ALMOST 5000 PEOPLE....

Few would have realised how potent support for Kahlilla was. She represented fortitude, defiance and the sort of insight that some kids have in spades. And many did come to know her ... either as the sparkly youngster around the corner or via the emotion-filled blog site that documented her battle with the disease. Her fellow students at Newhaven College were so moved by her life that the entire school decided to make YAMS its charity of 2010. The school has slated a series of fund raisers and plans to have Dr Wood visit to address them.

Fund-raising marathons, donations of paintings, donations of alpaca wool, donations of time and expertise ... it all adds up to the bedrock of a big-hearted community. And almost 5000 people whose consciousness has been touched by one small girl. ☐

One little girl. One brave family, One exceptional community.

Donations to YAMS of \$2 or more to the foundation are tax-deductible. Visit [www.yamsfoundation.org.au](http://www.yamsfoundation.org.au)

And now there's a Facebook page for the Foundation. ([www.facebook.com/pages/...Foundation-YAMS/235599053376](http://www.facebook.com/pages/...Foundation-YAMS/235599053376))



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