



## The AYJ Fund

*smiles ... connections ... cures*

The AYJ Fund was created in honor of Anna Yan Ji Arabia, who was diagnosed at age 13 with gliomatosis cerebri (GC), a rare brain tumor. At the time of Anna's diagnosis, there was no research being done on this type of cancer. We are committed to supporting new research now being conducted to find effective treatments and a cure for this devastating disease.



***The mission of the AYJ Fund is to bring smiles to kids with cancer, to keep them connected to friends and school through technology, and to support the research of gliomatosis cerebri (GC) and other brain cancers to find a cure.***

### Grateful .. Thankful .. Blessed

Fall is such a beautiful time of year, especially here in the Northern Berkshires of Massachusetts that we call home. We are excited to share all that the AYJ Fund has been up to this fall: our Golden SMILES Campaign; advocating for childhood cancer legislation and funding; and raising awareness during September, Childhood Cancer Awareness Month. AYJ Fund participated in the Fall Foliage Parade, and we traveled to London for the 5<sup>th</sup> International GC Conference. We also fit in our Wine, Chocolate and Craft Beer Tasting event in North Adams on November 2, which is always a great time.

As the days get colder, and we get closer to the holiday season, it is time to focus on the many children with cancer who will miss out on holiday fun. Days that should be filled with excitement and activities, are instead being spent on long days in the hospital, at clinic appointments, or receiving difficult medical treatments. Our AYJ Holiday SMILES program focuses on bringing joy to children with cancer during this time. Our goal is to send over 250 packages and gift cards, and we know with your support we will be able to again this year.

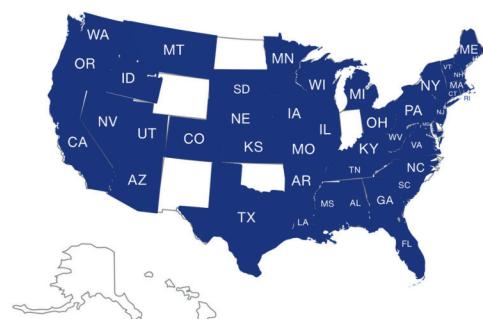


*Kathy & Joe*

### 5 Years, 21 More States



In 2020, we were proud to share that we had reached 23 states with our AYJ SMILES. Now, just 5 years later, we have served over 5,900 SMILES to a total of 44 states. Our goal is to reach every child who needs a SMILE, and with your help, we will soon reach children in all 50 states.



**AYJ**  
Smiles



**AYJ**  
Connections



**AYJ**  
Cures



## AYJ SMILES



### Siblings SMILES

We know that cancer is tough not only on the child who is diagnosed, but also for siblings. Siblings are impacted by parents having to spend time at the hospital, medical appointments, and many days and nights away. We love when we can spread joy to the whole family! Wendo and her younger sister were thrilled when Wendo opened up her AYJ SMILES package and found enough joy to spread smiles with her sister.



### Kindi Gets A SMILES

A cancer diagnosis brings additional challenges for a teen, adolescent or young adult. We love to pick out AYJ SMILES that mean so much to this age group. Our intern Tonimarie selected items for Kindi and we loved to see her beautiful smiles as she shared how grateful she was.

### Mimi's Smiles Say It All



Mimi is an honors student who advocated to continue to take her AP classes and honors classes throughout her treatment, and is often seen in clinic completing her classwork while receiving her chemotherapy treatment. Her hope is to go on to college and double major in biology and environmental studies and study environmental impact on medical conditions. She can be found in clinic studying on her computer during treatments.

*“It’s almost like you knew her. She loved everything! And the tote bag! Thank you so much for making her day!*

“

”

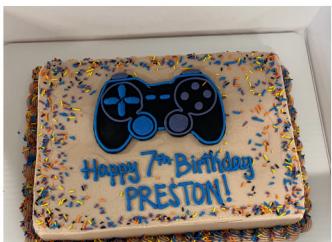
### A Party for Preston

Preston was in the hospital for his 7<sup>th</sup> birthday, going through difficult treatment for his leukemia. When he was feeling better, we helped him celebrate his birthday in his classroom. Preston and his classmates loved his party and the gaming-themed gift bags we sent. Peyton’s classmates thanked him profusely and said it was the best party at school ever! The cake from local baker Two Ten Cakes was a hit too!

*“He was SO happy and SO “normal” there. It was the first time since diagnosis and we appreciate you all so very much!!*

“

”



## Fall Foliage Parade

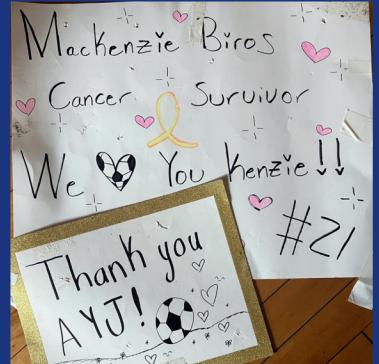
The AYJ Fund filled the parade route with princes, princesses, and other popular Disney characters for the annual Fall Foliage Parade in North Adams, MA. This year's group of 40 walked the route in 80 degree temperatures to spread joy to the crowd that lined the streets.

Mary Scanlon shared her beautiful voice and had us singing Disney tunes along with her throughout the parade route. Once again, the children along the parade route were thrilled to see their favorites, waving, running over to hug their special friends, taking photos and jumping with joy as we walked by. We are so grateful to both our high school volunteers and our young princesses for participating in such a fun parade day, and for supporting the AYJ Fund all year-round.



# Soccer Smiles at Hoosac Valley High School

We love when our AYJ SMILES come full circle. Mackenzie Biros was a preschooler undergoing cancer treatment when we first met her in 2014 with an AYJ SMILE. This year, we were invited to Hoosac Valley High School girl's soccer game, a fundraiser for the AYJ Fund, honoring team member Mackenzie during Childhood Cancer Awareness Month. Billie and Ed Allard represented the AYJ Fund and said both teams were engaged, respectful and interested as Billie shared AYJ Fund's story and thanked both teams for this special event. Thank you to Mackenzie, Coach Carlos, Coach McGinnis and the entire team.

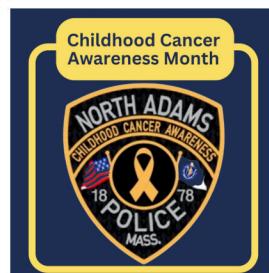


## The Villages



In 1997 we met Linda and Chuck Formica as we traveled to China to adopt our Anna and their daughter Nicole. They now live in The Villages in Florida. They brought their friends and community group together and held a fundraiser for the AYJ Fund. We joined the group via Zoom, to talk about the AYJ Fund, our programs, and how we support children with cancer. This generous community donated over \$1,900 for the AYJ Fund. Thank you!

## NAPD Supports Childhood Cancer



Throughout September, the North Adams Police Department sold limited-edition childhood cancer awareness police patches, and raised \$710 for the AYJ Fund. All proceeds support AYJ Fund's programs for local children and families impacted by cancer. The AYJ Fund is blessed to work with organizations such as the North Adams Police Department to boost support for Childhood Cancer Awareness during September, and all year-round.

## AYJ Sightings



Joe driving in the Fall Foliage Parade



Tara & Will sporting AYJ in Barbados



Hudson, Jake & Ceci honoring Anna with Strong Little Souls

## AYJ Soap Box Car Derby

We cheered on Aaron as he cruised Main Street North Adams in the city's first annual Soap Box Car Derby. Thanks to MaryAnn & Leon King for the AYJ Fund sponsorship. It was a great day of thrilling rides and creative cars.



Bright Initiatives is a public platform and collaborative network for people creating real, positive change in their communities. We are honored to have AYJ Fund included as a featured initiative. Bright Initiatives was developed by Virgil Stucker and Jeff Zimmerman.

## BRIGHT INITIATIVES



*"We believe that even the smallest acts of hope and courage deserve recognition—and that sharing these stories helps seed action in others. Bright Initiatives is a hub for community-minded change-makers who prioritize mission and solutions over self-promotion and complaints."*

### AYJ FUND: SMILES, CONNECTIONS & HOPE FOR KIDS WITH CANCER

With deep compassion and purpose, Kathy and Joe Arabia turned the unimaginable loss of their daughter Anna (Anna Yan Ji) into a national force for good. Founded in 2013, the AYJ Fund uplifts children with cancer through three integrated programs:

#### SMILES, CONNECTIONS, and CURES

From joyful gift experiences to virtual classroom connections to groundbreaking research, the organization helps kids stay connected to life, school, and hope — even during grueling hospital stays.

Run entirely by volunteers, the AYJ Fund has delivered more than 5,000 moments of joy and invested over \$1.4 million in research targeting gliomatosis cerebri and other rare pediatric brain cancers. Through strategic collaborations with medical institutions, international researchers, and policymakers, they've brought new attention and resources to a long-overlooked disease. Families write to say how much the gifts and connections mean. Researchers now study what once had no funding. And a mother and father's grief has become a spark for thousands of children — and a brighter future.

[brightinitiatives.org](http://brightinitiatives.org)

### North Adams Childhood Cancer Proclamation

In September, the AYJ Fund received a proclamation by Mayor Macksey of North Adams recognizing September as Childhood Cancer Awareness Month. The Proclamation includes the reminder that advocacy and investments are key figures in the fight to end cancer, as well as recognizing not only the hope of children who face cancer, but the strength of caregivers, siblings, and other family members who continue with this journey each day. Thanks to AYJ Board Member MaryAnn King for attending the City Council meeting to receive this proclamation.



### State House Visit

AYJ Fund was proud to be a part of the American Childhood Cancer Organizations's Advocacy Day at the Massachusetts State House to urge for passage of S1602/H2434 An Act Improving Pediatric Cancer Research. We met with legislators and shared Anna's story and the need for increased research for childhood cancer. We are thankful to Senator Patrick O'Connor and Representative Jessica Giannino for their leadership and to our local team of Representative John Barrett III and Senator Paul Mark for co-sponsoring this important bill for Massachusetts.



### Day of Action

Kathy joined The National Brain Tumor Society's Day of Action to advocate for increased funding for research through the NIH, the BRAIN Act, and the Give Kids a Chance Act, and Accelerating Kid's Access to Care. Virtual meetings were held throughout the day with legislative offices. Photo below is Representative Jim McGovern meeting with Ethan Gorham and Kathy. We are grateful for Representative McGovern's commitment to funding cancer and medical research.





# AYJ CURES



5<sup>th</sup> International  
Gliomatosis Cerebri  
Conference

## 5<sup>th</sup> International Gliomatosis Cerebri Conference, London



Above: GC Global Families Fighting Together



Above: Clinicians, Researchers and Families



Above: Our Boston Team in London



The Institute of Cancer Research in Sutton, just outside of London, was the perfect place to start the family/foundation day of the 5<sup>th</sup> International GC Conference. Ten foundations gathered together to tour the ICR lab of Chris Jones, PhD, and the exciting research being done by his team. His lab has a focus on GC and his staff shared their exciting research work. Our foundations shared best practices and committed to continue to work together to fund research.

60 clinicians and researchers joined on day 2 as we received GC research updates from the US, UK, Europe, Korea, and India. It was inspiring to hear the commitment to sharing research ideas, mouse models, cell lines, and more to advance GC research forward to find effective treatments for this still deadly disease.

In 2016, the World Health Organization, which develops the classification of brain tumors, moved to a classification based on molecular markers, and removed GC as a tumor type. They listed it as a pattern of growth, as at the time molecular markers had not been researched. WHO Committee members presented on this process, and we had speakers presenting new research on molecular distinctions and advocating for the reclassification of GC specifically for pediatric classifications.

Additional discussions focused on sharing data to identify additional cases to expand research data, and removing barriers in clinical trials to increase access to patients with GC. Many participants also expressed interest in additional international collaborations to advance knowledge, research data, and support of patients with GC.

The foundations collaboratively committed to funding a research grant. Grant applicants presented their proposed research projects, with the top 4 grants being scored. Winner(s) will be selected for funding shortly, and we will share more information at that time.

We left London inspired by the new discoveries on GC tumor cells, the additional researchers and facilities now focused on GC and the collaboration of all attending this important conference. We are now challenged to increase funding to keep this research moving forward.



## Reflections from our Researchers



April Apfelbaum  
Bandopadhyay Lab  
Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

### What research are you involved in?

One of my projects in the lab is studying pediatric gliomas that have alterations in the protein Fibroblast Growth Factor Receptor 1 (FGFR1). These mutations are enriched in pediatric low-grade gliomas and patients with these tumors are treated with chemotherapy after surgical resection. Many of these patients suffer lifelong co-morbidities and better treatment options are needed. We have modeled these FGFR1 alterations in isogenic neural stem cell models and been performing preclinical analysis of these cell lines in response to targeted inhibitors, including panFGFR inhibitors. In addition, we are also trying to find targetable genetic dependencies that are specific to FGFR1-altered gliomas so that we can identify new therapeutics for these patients. We have recently published a paper that describes these FGFR1-driven models and the potential for targeted inhibitor treatment.

Article can be found in Nature Journal at:  
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-025-61820-z>



*We will continue to highlight researchers in our monthly email updates and future newsletters.*

## AYJ Fund HOLIDAY SMILES

The holidays are such a special time for a child, a time filled with vacation days, joy, family get togethers, presents, and families spending fun times together. For a child with cancer, the holidays are not the same. Many children are hospitalized, and for others the days continue to be filled with medications, hospital or clinic visits, more doctors appointments than family get togethers, and chemotherapy or other difficult treatments. Our AYJ Fund Holiday SMILES program is our way to brighten the holidays for many children with cancer. You can help us to bring this joy to so many.

This holiday season, we once again plan to send Holiday SMILES to over 200 children. We will fill string backpacks with lots of fun gifts and send them to the Jimmy Fund Clinic at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Weill Cornell Medical Center, and Baystate Medical Center. We will also send gift cards to children at Children's Hospital Los Angeles and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. In addition, we send gifts to children we have connected with, who also spend much of the holidays undergoing testing or treatments or recovering from side effects of their treatments.

We ask for your sponsorship of one or more AYJ Holiday SMILES to help us to reach more children and spread more joy and smiles throughout the holiday season. Please help us to make this a special holiday season for these children who deserve so much.

 *Kathy + Joe*

## Sponsor a Holiday SMILE

I would like to sponsor \_\_\_\_ Holiday SMILES at \$25 each    Total donation \$\_\_\_\_\_  
Make checks payable to AYJ Fund

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to AYJ Fund 201 Eagle St. North Adams, MA 01247  
Or donate online at [AYJfund.org](http://AYJfund.org) or AYJ Fund on Venmo  
All donations are tax-deductible.



AYJ Fund  
201 Eagle St.  
North Adams, MA 01247  
www.ayjfund.org  
AYJ Fund on Facebook



Fall 2025

## AYJ Fund Amazon Wish List

Thank you to Elisabeth Charnley Bottomsly, Diane Dickerman, and Nancy Wojnicki who found our AYJ Fund Wish List on Amazon and ordered these great gifts. We love these surprises and know

the children who receive these in their AYJ SMILES packages will too! Wish lists are no longer searchable on Amazon, but can be accessed through this link:

[bit.ly/AYJwish](https://bit.ly/AYJwish)

or through this QR Code:

After you have accessed the list once, you will be able to easily access it through the "Account and Lists" drop down at the top of your Amazon account page. Items will change, so keep checking back.



AYJ Fund  
Amazon Wish List

## AYJ Memorials

### Eva Maruco

Eva lived a full life and at 107 years old she had a lifetime of memories of sewing and cooking for her wonderful family and friends.



### Helen Superneau

Helen was a longtime supporter of the AYJ Fund, writing a generous check just days before she became an angel.

## Ways to Donate

AYJ Fund has many ways you can donate to help fund SMILES and research for children with cancer:

- Online at [ayjfund.org](http://ayjfund.org) - the PayPal "Donate" button, accepts credit card or PayPal
- Venmo account at the QR Code here.
- Through your Donor-Advisor Fund

AYJ Fund  
@AYJFund

You can sponsor a Holiday SMILES Package through any of these payment options, or mail the form on the previous page.

