



Touching Lives, BEATING THE ODDS

By Dena Pruett

More than 10,000 patients in the U.S. are diagnosed with life-threatening diseases such as leukemia or lymphoma every year.



Of these patients, 70 percent in need of a transplant do not have a matching donor in their family. If the patient is from a diverse racial and ethnic background, the percentage of potential adult donors is 10 or below compared to 74 percent for Caucasian patients.

To offset these grim odds, the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP) and the Be the Match Foundation operate the world's largest and most diverse registry of potential marrow donors and donated cord blood units. Since 1987, the NMDP has facilitated more than 43,000 marrow, peripheral blood stem cells, and cord blood transplants for patients through unrelated donors.

In February 2012, the Shreveport-Bossier LifeShare Blood Center, an affiliate of NMDP, and the Centenary College men's basketball team joined forces to boost the chances that a local 9-year-old boy would find a potentially life-saving bone marrow match.

Two years ago, Sir Terrence Mack was diagnosed with Natural Killer T-cell Lymphoma when his mother took him to the doctor for what she believed to be a simple cold. This type of lymphoma is not only rare but almost unheard of for someone of African-American descent. He received chemotherapy and radiation treatments, but the key to his treatment was to find a matching bone marrow donor.

Following his diagnosis, Sir Terrence was invited to serve as honorary team captain at several Centenary basketball games. Once an avid basketball player, the illness sapped his energy to play. The men's basketball team wanted to do more for the young boy, so they organized a bone marrow drive during their home game on February 11.

"Sir Terrence deserves a chance to continue to fight his lymphoma," said Adam Walsh, head men's basketball coach. "We hope that our efforts to raise awareness and encourage bone marrow donor registrations help find him a match."

Since the donor drive, a bone marrow match has been found, and Sir Terrence's treatment will continue. Sir Terrence's mother, Wadell Hayes, is hopeful.

"It means a lot to me. He just wants to have a normal life again – to go back to school and do things with his brothers."

For information on how to become a donor, visit marrow.org/join. ■