

Madison's Caring Heart

Madison Welsh was happy and healthy until the age of three, when she woke up one morning with a paralyzed right arm and hand. Rushed to the emergency room at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, Madison was found to have aggressive lesions in her brain, ultimately leading to a diagnosis of pediatric multiple sclerosis. With the help of an incredible medical team, Madison began a course of monthly infusions and treatments that have put her in remission. In 2019, Madison and her family visited Give Kids The World Village on her wish trip and have since returned twice as part of the Welcome Back Family program.

"Our week at Give Kids The World Village was extraordinary and so magical. It helped us get through the darkest time in our lives and create the most cherished memories. As the family of a wish child, that is simply irreplaceable," says Madison's mom, Lisa. "Madison's carefree and fun personality was back during our wish trip. That was something that had faded when she became sick. To see her filled with so much joy and excitement gave our family a lot of hope and happiness. It was the break we didn't know we needed. Madison was able to be a kid again and after many difficult months, that feeling is one that sticks with you long after the trip is over. After experiencing the love and magic of the Village, our family pledged to do everything we could to help other wish families relax, reconnect and regain a sense of normalcy at the place that brought us so much joy. We were overcome with the urge to give back."

Since their wish visit, the Welshes have supported the Village by raising funds the past two years as part of Coasting for Kids. Most recently, seven-year-old Madison and her parents raised nearly \$4,800 to make wishes possible by setting up their own DIY fundraiser, Madison Mae's Gift of Hope Drive, and sharing it on social media every few days. In addition, in honor of Madison, her elementary school raised \$538 by hosting a dress down day in which students donated \$1 or more to forego wearing their school uniforms. Lisa and her husband, Mike, also collected donations at their workplaces, with one of Mike's co-workers – former Pittsburgh Pirates catcher Michael McHenry – hosting a baseball clinic for donations and then matching the amount raised.

"We are humbled and honored to have crushed our goal of \$1,000! Our hearts are bursting and we are happy to instill the importance of giving back to Madison at her young age. She was so excited with each donation that trickled in! We are extremely proud of her empathy and caring heart. We look forward to hosting our next fundraiser and encourages other wish families to do the same!"

To learn more about creating a DIY fundraiser for the Village, visit www.gktw.org/help/fundraise/.

