



Photos provided by the YouTurn Foundation



a heart for others

YouTurn Foundation Gives Children a Better Life

BY ANN CIPPERLY

While attending a fundraiser dinner, Jonna Chizik's heart was touched as she listened to Dena Little talk about Storybook Farm to friends. Jonna became troubled when Little told the group about a high school student with mental challenges who was beaten up by a drunken relative, breaking or cracking most of his teeth. Little had been trying to find funding for months to pay to have his teeth repaired, as the family could not afford dental bills.

On the way home Jonna mentioned to a friend it was unacceptable that a young person would have to suffer with cracked teeth simply because of money. That night she couldn't sleep thinking about it.

The next morning she called her family's dentist, Dr. Brian Hollingsworth, to tell him about the youth. He also felt it was unacceptable. Hollingsworth worked with his colleagues to donate most of the work for the \$10,000 in dental repair.

That incident opened Jonna's eyes to children with needs who fall through the cracks.

When Jonna and husband Gene, head football coach of the Auburn Tigers, arrived in Auburn from Iowa State, they began quietly working behind the scenes volunteering to help children. During the football season last year, Jonna attended meetings with non-profit organizations that help youth locally and around the state to build a database of experts. She also began adding names of volunteers and caring people with a heart for others.

Jonna realized that while there were many agencies to help, there were children

that did not fit the criteria for an agency or who had unusual situations requiring financial or emotional help.

After conducting much research and building a strong database, Gene and Jonna founded the Chizik Family YouTurn Foundation, Inc. "The reason we wrote the book *ALL IN*," says Jonna, "was for the proceeds to go to YouTurn."

Their desire is "to partner with non-profit organizations in Alabama who work directly with youth to positively impact their future; to help turn them around from a potentially negative direction, and to equip them with the tools necessary for ensuring their own success."

"The concept of YouTurn comes from a metaphor related to a 'U turn' road sign," says Jonna. "The organization would like to help children who make wrong choices and/or (who are) being negatively affected by situations to do a U turn in their lives toward right choices and a better life."

"YouTurn is designed to meet the needs of children who fall through the cracks from other organizations and to



Photos provided by aTeam Ministries



aTeam Ministries: Frontline Support for Families BY ANN CIPPERLY

Soon after Gene and Jonna Chizik arrived in Auburn, Andy and Jan Thrower of Birmingham, founders of aTeam Ministries, invited the couple to visit the oncology clinic at Children's Hospital. The Chiziks did not know the Throwers, but accepted the invitation to visit the children going through the pediatric cancer journey.

"We were blown away," says Jonna. The Chiziks became involved in the ministry and now support it through the YouTurn Foundation.

The Throwers founded aTeam Ministries after their son, Anderson, was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. Anderson was only 16 months old.

From the initial diagnosis of their son, the Throwers saw the need to support families going through the journey of dealing with oncology- or hematology-related diseases in children. They created aTeam Ministries to provide "frontline" support to families.

"Our purpose," say the Throwers, "is to offer spiritual, financial and emotional support to pediatric-cancer families during the initial diagnosis, throughout the treatment process and when the treatment process is complete."

Jonna suggested they rent a home, rather than paying hotel bills for families coming from out-of-town for treatment. They found a townhouse to rent, owned by someone in Opelika, for the Home Away From Home program sponsored by aTeam.

"Many of the children receiving treatment in the oncology department have weakened immunity systems and cannot stay at the McDonald house since they cannot be around other people," says Jonna.

The last few children staying in the townhouse had received bone marrow transplants. After staying in the hospital nearly 100 days, they were required to stay another 100 days living within 15 to 20 minutes of the hospital. Their immune systems were so weakened they had to stay near the hospital in order to receive potentially life-saving antibiotics quickly if they had a fever.

"The Home Away From Home program is designed so that families can enjoy the comforts of a 'home' in the Birmingham area while receiving treatment," says Andy. "We provide an intern who stays in the house to help provide for immediate needs of the family."

The program is intended to provide the families with everything they would need if they were in their own home. All of the utilities are paid, and there is no charge for using the townhouse.

For critical financial cases, aTeam Ministries assists with grants for rent, mortgage, utilities and treatment.

During the summer of 2010, Jonna, Andy and other board members met to brainstorm ideas for a fundraiser. Jonna suggested patients and artists work together to create a "masterpiece" to auction. This led to the first Heart to HeART Gala held this past February.

Ten artists were paired with 10 children, who had to show the artists things that describe them. Each child drew two pictures with the artists, with one going to the silent auction. The artist created a painting for the live auction. The children, families and artists were presented as the emcee shared the special meaning that inspired the artwork.

The children and their families arrived at the gala by limousine. Gene opened the doors and led them to the red carpet. "He was more like a dad that night than a coach," remembers Andy. "He had such an amazing way of making those kids feel special."

The 2012 Heart to HeART Gala will be held in February at Ted's Garage in Birmingham.

"Jan and I are so thankful for how God has allowed us to get to know Coach and Jonna," says Andy. "We are so grateful for their desire to serve and help at aTeam Ministries, and the work God has called us to with pediatric-cancer families."

For more information on how you can help, visit www.ateaministries.org.



partner with other non-profit organizations that fall outside the perimeter of their ministry.

"We want YouTurn to be a hotline for the community when they see a youth in need. YouTurn can find the correct agency or person to help. It can accommodate a need for a child, whether it is financial, physical or emotional, to make a difference in a child's life," says Jonna.

While helping children in current, bad situations, Jonna is very much aware of being proactive. She asked Dr. Scott Sprayberry to provide an orthodontic scholarship to help a child who desperately needed braces, but had no financial means.

He was "all in" and told her he would provide not one but three scholarships.

Sprayberry and Hollingsworth, along with others in the community, are included in the database. "When someone contacts YouTurn," says Jonna, "we know where to find the help."

Jonna has compiled an advisory council. Several friends who were already active in volunteering have been paired with an organization. Each is responsible for checking on needs weekly with the agency.

"We want to be proactive, looking for ways to help level the playing field," says Jonna. "These children are caught up in an economic situation that is not fair. We are standing in the gap. It is a hand up, not a hand out. YouTurn is looking for ways to give children a voice.

"I feel YouTurn is a clearinghouse for need," says Jonna. "There are many in the community who want to make a difference, but they don't know where to go. They can go to the YouTurn website or Facebook and see what we need."

The foundation does not make generic donations to endowments or operating budgets. "We will ensure that the funds are directly and tangibly used to impact youth in a positive way through specific programs and needs that truly make a difference," says Jonna.

YouTurn recently donated two puppies to the Youth Development Center. "The gift of these precious puppies

has already had a transformative effect among the fragile, at-risk teens being served in Passages and Journeys," says Dr. Laura Cooper, director of the Youth Development Center.

"The 'Paws 4 Hope Academy' is a longstanding idea that is now on the fast track thanks to Jonna and the YouTurn Foundation," says Cooper. "The premise of the academy is to pair our at-risk and vulnerable children with puppies and dogs who are also at-risk and vulnerable.

"When those pups nuzzle their little heads in the folds of our children's arms, you can literally see calm and peace in the eyes and souls of children who have experienced years of turmoil. Diamond and Snow have such sweet, gentle spirits, and they are providing that unconditional love that our children so crave!"

YouTurn is currently designing innovative and life-changing programs and events that will create specific opportunities for individuals to be part of the YouTurn team.

The Chiziks are asking the community to be ALL IN and serve others by becoming involved with YouTurn to make a powerful difference and a lasting impact.

Everyone is encouraged to like "All In For You Turn" on Facebook and please visit <http://allinforyouturn.com>, to sign up for ways to contribute to future events and activities for making a difference.