

September 11th: Lori's Story

September marks my two-year anniversary working for PCFLV. Back in 2016, after retiring from a longtime government job, I was looking for volunteer opportunities and PCFLV “found” me. My google searches were all providing the same results, Pediatric Cancer Foundation of the Lehigh Valley. My son Christopher is a pediatric cancer survivor, so it seemed like the universe was sending me a signal. So here I am.

Two years is a lifetime in the world of pediatric cancer. Children get diagnosed, they get better and move on. Some children relapse, some need years and years of treatment, and some children don't get better, they die. I am often asked by friends and family, “How do you do it?” “because, you know, it's pediatric cancer and no one wants to think about that, it's too uncomfortable. It reminds me of when my son was diagnosed 27 years ago when we were in the trenches of pediatric cancer, again family and friends would say “I don't know how you do it.” Crazy right? What choice did we have? When it's your kid, you put your head down and do it.

Now when I reflect on the past two years, where I have immersed myself in the world of pediatric cancer by choice, I sometimes think “Gosh, how do I do it? And why? It's so heart wrenching sometimes.” And then I realize there's no “how do I do it” in this situation, it's “how do **we** do it”. “We” are PCFLV. A small team of employees, an army of loyal volunteers and a supportive and giving community. The heart-felt generosity of the PCFLV community in Lehigh Valley is awe-inspiring, from the little girl who collects donations in lieu of birthday presents to the big money sponsors who help us to plan and maintain our financial sustainability.

Financial sustainability. Did I just say that? Yes, because that is the backbone of our providing services to our “families”, also part of the “we” of PCFLV.

At the core of PCFLV are my co-workers, Michelle, Tracy, Kris. We are the ones who get the phone call from the mom of a newly diagnosed child, scared senseless, who doesn't know what to say to us, just bursts into tears and says “my child has cancer”. We are the ones following our “kids” journeys through treatments. We watch the innocent children and teenagers, who have no business dealing with this beast called cancer, isolated for months, while their parents and family struggle to keep all the balls in the air, siblings, jobs, bills, mortgages, food, and gas. We watch our “kids” get better and move on, we watch them relapse. And we watch with great sadness when a child or teenager loses their battle. And we cry. We cry at every sad juncture and we cheer for every victory, no matter how small. And at every step of the journey, we ask each other “how can we help them?”.

So in response to the question “How do I do it”, I don't. We do it. We do it for our families. We are there for the journey. We are Team PCFLV.