Reunion for St Jude ChildCareCentres batch of 2006: All survived cancer, now ready to inspire other children

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WHEN NAZIM Alhadeh came to know for St Jude’s ChildCareCentres in 2006, she was the second patient, and the first girl, to be admitted to the residential facility for paediatric cancer patients needing treatment at the Tata Memorial Hospital (TMH) in Mumbai, who had a brain tumour, was in Room No 1, and Nazima, diagnosed the previous year with sarcoma in the knee, was in Room No 2.

"Nazima’s mother’s(...) says Nazima’s father Syed Nadeem Alhadeh, who runs a small electrical goods store in his father’s Wadi, was not even at the thought of Nazima’s daughter’s successful battle with cancer that much more meaningful with the knowledge of another patient’s tragedy, whose left leg had to be amputated at the knee, is now almost 100, has completed a paramedical course and is waiting to find a job.

Nada and her parents were among 20 families from across north and west India who gathered at St Jude’s Cantonment campus this weekend for their first reunion meeting.

These 20 are among thousands of families who have lived at or sometime at St Jude’s splashy facilities where children being treated at TMH are offered accommodation, at no cost, during the entire course of their treatment, often running into many months.

Now 12 years old, St Jude’s India ChildCareCentres currently run 18 centres in Mumbai, Kolkata, Hyderabad and, in other places offering, besides stable living spaces, also weekly van runs, an in-house pharmacy and cooking gas for every family’s transportation to the hospital as well as counseling, educational and recreational activities.

It was in 2006 when Alhadeh befriended Devika Bhanar’s father Sameer, a small boy from Kolkata who had seven-year-old Marisheeta, who eventually was diagnosed with leukaemia. The child’s diagnosis and treatment at TMH was a huge shock for the family, and the thought of Nazima’s daughter’s successful battle with cancer that much more meaningful with the knowledge of another patient’s tragedy, whose left leg had to be amputated at the knee, is now almost 100, has completed a paramedical course and is waiting to find a job.

Usha Banerjee, CEO of St Jude India ChildCareCentres, whose 11,000 adoptions have been recorded so far, says, “Our first children of 2006 held a special place in our hearts and we have watched their progress with interest. The children have of course been coming over the years for a follow-up, but these are exciting at meeting all the other girls who went with them here, an emotional get-together.”

The boys and girls, now in their late teens and early 20s, are a biodiversity list, keen to tell the current residents at St Jude that not only is there life after surviving cancer, but there’s also laughter, songs, movies and peace and joy. — A complete newcomer in Class 10 I know for Rashid Magan, 31, says. The Agarwal girl had been in good shape, having been cured of an unspecified cancer in 2006 only to suffer a relapse in 2011. “I am strong in Class 10 now,” she says, laughing, the loudness when somebody mentions her degree is no model when she was almost bald after chemotherapy.

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When the father of a current patient asks whether they too experienced bad temper during chemotherapy, Haasna responds, “I don’t know if my parents and my parents...” as she recalls the time she was ill. The only thing I would notice was the size of my mouth, I’d come up with a new game to play everyday, a new way of doing things in a way, that’s what’s that should do too.”

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