

Fight Friends in the

My friend Connor, was diagnosed with a rare brain tumor three years ago. He was faced with a grim prognosis, and a long and arduous road ahead of intensive treatment. With many surgeries, and much of his time spent at the hospital, Connor was soon out of school. Surprisingly, I noticed that each day, the conversations and thoughts of Connor grew farther and farther apart amongst the students at our school, despite the fact that the prospects of his life were also growing dimmer and dimmer. I began to visit Connor each day in his home, playing board games he enjoyed, watching a favorite movie, or simply having a conversation that did not contain words such as “chemotherapy”, “radiation”, or “surgery”.

Soon, I also began to travel with Connor and his mother on their often gloomy and monotonous weekly trips to the hospital for treatments. Chemotherapy often took hours, but after staying with him for a few treatments, Connor’s mother noticed instantaneously that simply having company in this otherwise unpleasant experience, made Connor happier and even have a healthier blood count. Instead of feeling cripplingly sick after the chemotherapy treatment, Connor was bouncing back better than ever. At first, I never imagined my friendship and comfort would make much of a difference; I was only trying to be there for a suffering peer that everyone else had seemed to have forgotten. Little did I know that friendship can work miracles – and it only takes one person to make it happen.

This experience inspired my dream of a program called Friends in the Fight. Every day, I saw many other children, infants, and teenagers, in the chemotherapy clinic who had no one at their side to ease their weight with a smile or a kind word. Friends in the Fight is a vision for friendship, a vision for caring, and a vision to make sure that no cancer patient is ever left alone in their fight. Friends in the Fight would realize this dream, and provide cancer patients of all ages with a youth who can offer friendship and an upbeat attitude. Teens would be matched with a cancer patient, and serve as the person who can be by the treatment bed of the patient, distract them from the day-to-day worries of being ill, and be there as someone who the patient can wake up looking forward to seeing, rather than waking up hopeless. Teens that are matched with infants can read books, bring a stuffed animal, or simply play with the child in their treatment bed. Small children simply do not understand why they have to spend hours in a bed with a needle in their arm, and it only takes a friend making a silly face to distract them for a precious second. Teens matched with teens can watch movies, play games, or talk about the normal things the patient may be missing out on. Connor lost his teenage life when he was diagnosed, and telling him stories from school or weekend trips, brightened his day, and made him feel connected to a world he was suddenly isolated from.

Friends in the Fight has the potential to change lives and sweep the Golden State of California in a beautiful way. High school student bodies, sports teams, youth clubs, and church youth groups could all be approached in implementing Friends in the Fight. The resources for getting teens involved in this important cause are endless, and because of this wide base of accessibility, Friends in the Fight could be a grassroots community program that could take place all over California, and eventually, the nation. Friends in

the Fight can match these teens with cancer patients according to similar interests, hobbies, and compatible schedules. This program will not only brighten the lives of cancer patients, but encourage and reward community service and good moral character in California's teens.

The positive effects of my friendship and support of Connor were numerous and profound. Imagine the change that can happen from thousands of teens across California, touching the lives of cancer patients who are only given medicine for their weakened body, but never a healing hand for the part of them that is hurting but cannot be treated with a drug. Loneliness and the feeling of being forgotten can have a deeper pain than any illness, and it often makes the fight against cancer far slower and more perilous. A friend who reminds a patient that they are not alone, and that someone outside their family cares enough to smile and laugh with them, can make all the difference in their life, and sometimes even save it. The beauty of Friends in the Fight lies in what I discovered for myself: it only takes one person to be a friend, and it only takes one person to make a miracle happen.