

# Cookies for Kids' Cancer fights for the most vulnerable

BY IRINA IVANOVA | FEBRUARY 27, 2014



Gretchen Witt didn't realize that only a fraction of cancer research funding, often less than 5%, went toward pediatric cancers until her son was diagnosed with neuroblastoma in 2007.

"Kids with cancer don't make headlines," her son's pediatrician told her. So Ms. Witt, who is public relations director for OXO in Manhattan, went into baking mode. With the help of 200-some volunteers, she produced about 96,000 cookies for her first bake sale for cancer research. She netted \$420,000.

"I wanted to challenge myself," she said. "I wasn't looking to raise just a couple hundred dollars."

The following year, Ms. Witt launched her nonprofit, Cookies for Kids' Cancer, which helps companies raise funds through sports tournaments, fun runs and bake sales. More than once, the group has been the beneficiary of a baker trying to break a Guinness world record. In the past five years, Ms. Witt has raised \$8 million.

Her largest fundraiser was an extreme upscale riff on the bake sale: a 350-seat gala where top chefs cooked individual meals for each table. "I thought I was going to have to wear a sandwich board in the streets of Manhattan," she said, "but the event sold out before the invitations were printed."

Ms. Witt, 46, tackles these projects with just three staffers, two part-time, and an advisory board of medical professionals who choose the treatments to fund.

Nine studies funded by Cookies have led to clinical trials. For Ms. Witt, that number is less a sign of her success than the lack of funding. Further, survival rates for kids' cancers vary wildly. "Many types of pediatric cancer have not seen any improvement rates in decades," she said.

Her son, Liam, died in 2011 at age 6. Her cellphone's screensaver shows him wearing a chef's hat and peering over a mixing bowl.

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