



Bringing Hope to Those Living with Type 1 Diabetes

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS KELLY



Chris Kelly with his daughter Meg.

The truth about type 1 diabetes is that the onset of this autoimmune disease can occur at any age. Even though it is known as juvenile diabetes, adults are diagnosed just as often as children.

Researchers haven't yet

discovered what causes type 1 diabetes (T1D), but it's believed that genetics, viral infections and environmental factors – not diet and lifestyle choices – might play a role in the onset of T1D.

Understanding the cause of T1D may help scientists not only find a cure, but also a means to preventing the onset of T1D in the first place.

For nearly five decades, the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) has been at the forefront of medical research for T1D and contributed more than \$2 billion to research.

Some of the advancements being made through such funding include artificial pancreas technology and glucose-responsive insulin, which automatically turns on and off as needed while it circulates through the bloodstream.

JDRF also directly supports those who are living with T1D by providing numerous resources and community-focused support.

For Chris Kelly, a local resident of Rockville, Maryland, JDRF's outreach proved to be a vital resource.

In 2009, his 15-year-old daughter Meg was diagnosed with T1D. "We felt overwhelmed and alone," Chris says. "We knew very little about type 1 diabetes or its causes."

Chris and his wife, Denise, were at the hospital with Meg when a staff member told them about JDRF and asked if they wanted to be put in touch with the organization. The Kellys said yes and, within a few days, the organization sent the family a Bag of Hope. This backpack for newly diagnosed children is filled with educational materials, a blood glucose meter, a comforting stuffed animal and more.

This brief introduction to JDRF was just what the Kelly family needed during this difficult time. "We gravitated immediately to JDRF for support, and immediately became involved [with the local chapter]," Chris says.

Each member of the family – Meg, Chris and Denise – has volunteered with JDRF in different capacities.

One way Meg and Denise made a lasting impact

at their local chapter was through an event they planned together before Meg left home for Temple University in 2011. The mother and daughter duo organized an "off to college" panel discussion that focused on issues faced by young adults with T1D who are transitioning to college. Since the program's inception, it has become an annual event for the Greater Chesapeake and Potomac Chapter.

Chris began cycling and joined the JDRF Ride to Cure Diabetes team to raise funds for the organization, and he just completed his sixth charitable bike ride for the program.

"My fellow riders are really my support group," he says.

Even though Meg has moved away from home, Chris continues to be heavily involved with his local JDRF chapter. He recently joined its DC Board of Directors, and he also chairs the communications committee, helping to spread the word about JDRF's contributions to both the medical field and T1D community.



Chris Kelly participating in the JDRF Ride to Cure Diabetes.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS KELLY

"We are incredibly encouraged by the many life-changing breakthroughs that are happening as a result of JDRF-funded research," Chris says. "[Meg] wears an insulin pump that provides automated dosing, and a continuous glucose monitor that measures her blood glucose levels over time. Research funding provided by JDRF led to the development and marketing of these now widely-available devices."

**Story by Tara Shubbuck
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