

# Meet our Patient Hero



## **Andrew** Leukemia Survivor

In September, 2011, Andrew Christianson was an active, healthy 11 year-old who had just begun 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Shortly thereafter, he began suffering from headaches, exhaustion, fevers and a bloody nose. Although his parents suspected the common flu or an upper respiratory infection, initial tests were inconclusive. However, when his temperature reached 105 degrees, Andrew's parents rushed him to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center where doctors delivered the devastating news that Andrew had Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia.

Tests revealed that Andrew's spleen was extremely enlarged and that his bone marrow was 95% cancer. Immediate, aggressive treatment was critical. Over the next 13 months, this once active and carefree child endured a grueling treatment regimen, including 2 bone marrow biopsies, heavy doses of chemotherapy, 17 lumbar punctures and 4 extended hospital stays.

In October, 2012, and now in remission, Andrew began what will be nearly 2 ½ years of maintenance therapy. He receives 3 oral chemotherapy drugs daily, and endures quarterly lumbar punctures. While the treatment he received has saved his life, it has not been without side effects. Heavy doses of steroids resulted in Andrew developing osteonecrosis in his knees, requiring additional treatment and the use of crutches. Fortunately, the treatment was successful and Andrew's bones have healed. However, toxic chemotherapy drugs have damaged Andrew's liver. To prevent further damage, Andrew must take an additional drug.

Throughout his brutally powerful treatment, Andrew has displayed courage beyond his years. While not scheduled to complete the maintenance phase of his treatment until January, 2015, he has returned to playing soccer, swimming competitively and is an honor student. He remains relentless for a cure!