



MEET iZZY

*A tenacious
teen with a
fighting spirit*

The Heroes Circle is grateful for Izzy and her family, and their willingness to share their story so we can help change more lives.

Izzy Stothers is a fountain of creativity. She has a whole world of stories, poems, and songs she's written and saved on her phone. Her imagination has flourished since childhood, and she can rattle off her favorite characters she would pretend to be: Mickey Mouse, Thomas the Train, Minnie Mouse, Queen Izzy. "I love to write," says Izzy. "If I can, I'm on my phone typing my story."

"Creative" and "imaginative" are both appropriate words to describe Izzy. Her mom, Melonie, would add "tenacious" and "strong-willed." Her idols are powerful, creative women, like Taylor Swift and Amanda Gorman. All of this belies a contrasting, everyday reality for Izzy: She was born with complex congenital heart defects. She endured multiple open-heart surgeries prior to turning three, and was admitted to hospice before her fifth birthday. That was nearly a decade ago. Melonie credits Izzy's tenaciousness for playing "quite a role in her fighting spirit to continue going."

Along with Izzy's fighting spirit, Izzy's love of writing provides her with something beyond a hobby. For this thoughtful 14-year-old, the art of writing can serve as an escape from reality. Dealing with heart challenges can leave her either in pain, or tired out after a larger event. "It's just crazy," says Izzy of the feelings that can arise. "If I need to get away then I just start daydreaming, or I pick up my phone and make some other worlds. I touch a couple letters and it's true."





Undoubtably Izzy is a creative soul, and writing is helpful for her. Additionally, Izzy has become involved with the Heroes Circle, a wellness program that offers evidence-based martial arts therapies to children suffering from pediatric illnesses. Izzy has found the program to be helpful in managing pain and exhaustion. She was introduced to the Heroes Circle and their AYA Teen Empowerment Program by a social worker at the beginning of the pandemic. The virtual format was do-able for Izzy, who is primarily homebound and has been privately schooled since fifth grade. Melonie notes that for Izzy, who spends so much time with adults over kids her age, the connection she gets with kids her age is invaluable. “She is a social butterfly and just wants to be involved in everything,” says Melonie.

Izzy has found Power Breathing, the therapeutic breath training taught through the Heroes Circle, to be especially useful. “Usually for me, breathing is really hard,” she says, noting that with Power Breathing, “for some reason, it just makes things a whole lot easier.” As with her writing, she also finds the meditative aspects of the breathing useful, especially in dealing with the harder feelings that come with her challenges. “For me, it’s a way to get away from everything. I’m just feeling my breathing, and it’s something that is really helpful and comforting.” Students within the Heroes Circle talk about *“breathing in the light and blowing out the darkness.”* For Izzy, breathing in “the light” can mean tapping into good memories like gathering around the dinner table with family and friends.

Izzy truly exemplifies the Heroes Circle philosophy “Power, Peace, Purpose.” Power Breathing helps bring her peace, helping nourish her unique powers of creative writing. Izzy gets excited talking about her stories, or taking joy and inspirations from other artists, like jamming to one of her favorite songs, “Best Day of Your Life,” by the band The American Authors. “She’s an amazing kid; she’s touched so many lives,” says Melonie. As for Izzy herself, she is on a mission, saying, “I’ve always just wanted to do more in life.”