

Meet Aiden: A Little Hero with a *huge heart*

This Valentine's Day and every day, the Heroes Circle thanks all our contributors for their faith in us, as well as their support of children like Aiden and other young heroes.

If you have forgotten what it's like to be 6, Aiden Cole is a fun reminder. With a big, gap-toothed smile and the propensity to answer questions with an enthusiastic thumbs-up, Aiden is in many ways a typical 6-year-old boy. He loves dinosaurs; the T-Rex is his favorite. Ironman is his favorite superhero because "He can fly and no one can get him." He loves his one-year-old brother, especially playing hide-and-seek and letting him win by picking the same hiding place.

But life has not been typical for Aiden. On New Year's Eve of 2018, a sleepover with a cousin led to a fever of 103 degrees, and then a trip to Children's Hospital in Detroit. What everyone expected would be a passing illness turned into a two week stay at Children's and a diagnosis that shocked Aiden's grandmother and parents: Aiden has leukemia, a blood cancer. He was just 3 years old.

"It was really overwhelming," admits Michelle Day, Aiden's grandmother, noting that nothing like this had happened in their family before. She talks about being from a family of "faith walkers," yet the diagnosis stirred up a lot of feelings, from anger to simply questioning "How is this happening?" Having lived with a holistic approach to health, Aiden's family was challenged by everything suddenly being thrown their way: medications, medication side-effects, and restrictions on everything from where Aiden could go, to what he could eat.





Michelle first noticed the Heroes Circle program at the hospital on a pop-up banner. At that point, Aiden, typically an active boy, had been confined to the home for around 6 months. "YouTube was kind of his friend," she jokes. "We needed to find something for him to be a part of, while being careful at the same time of where he could go and what he could do." Michelle reached out, and soon Aiden was taking martial arts therapeutic classes with Sensei Peter and Sensei Michael. Aiden was shy at first, but the Heroes Circle gave him the opportunity to be around kids like himself. And even at 3 years old, he was able to pick up on Power Breathing, the cornerstone to the pain management therapies children learn through Heroes Circle programming. "I didn't know he had picked up on it and knew it outside of class until there was this situation at the doctor's office, and he ended up doing his inhale, exhale, and I was kind of shocked because I didn't know he was really going to apply it, or knew when to do it," Michelle says.



Even during the pandemic, which hit mid-way through Aiden's treatment protocol—which should wrap-up around April of this year—the Heroes Circle offered support. Aiden's family has participated in many of the drive-by events for holidays, as well as online cooking classes and Zoom classes. Aiden's favorite Zoom activity is Show & Tell. Michelle says the Heroes Circle, "Creates a community that gives you a nurturing type of community to share and feel comfortable reaching out. Definitely get involved."



Meanwhile, for all the challenges Aiden has faced, he's a playful kid with a great smile. When asked if the world needs more love this coming Valentine's Day, Aiden claps enthusiastically, citing his mother's cooking and the care he receives as examples of love. Then, suddenly serious, Aiden demonstrates Power Breathing. He rubs his hands together, clasps them, and closes his eyes. With a precision you might not associate with a child, he slowly draws his hands upward while slowly inhaling, holds his hands at eye level for a pause, then slowly exhales, pushing his hands back down.

For Michelle, all this shows how Aiden is her own "Little Hero." She notes that Aiden never complains. "I know all that he's endured. He has taught us how to fight and endure and get through pain," she says. "He is faith in human form."