

Dear Friends, Family, and Colleagues,

You may or may not be aware of my involvement in an organization called Streetlight (www.shands.org/streetlight). For two years, I have committed myself to this program and its mission. Streetlight is a palliative care, peer support program for teens and young adults with chronic/terminal illnesses. We operate out of Shands Hospital, and the majority of our 76 volunteers are pre-med students from the University of Florida. We spend most of our time with children who have cancer, sickle cell, cystic fibrosis, GI disorders, and transplants. Many of our volunteers, myself included, find ourselves forming long-term relationships with patients and their families. It is not uncommon for patients to request being seen by a volunteer as soon as they are admitted. As memorable and life changing as some of the connections we have may be, they can also be difficult. Many of our patients succumb to their illnesses throughout the course of our friendships.

When I first joined Streetlight, I was immediately placed in a challenging situation. For the first time in my life, I was at the bedside of a teenager, my own age, who was waiting for a life-saving double lung transplant. This young man had cystic fibrosis. I did not know a lot about his condition when I met him, but have since experienced CF in ways a textbook could never teach me. Streetlight and myself were truly this teen's only support network---he lacked family support. I saw him as he lay in agony awaiting new lungs, followed him as he was recovering from a double lung transplant, consoled him when he called to tell me he was rejecting his new lungs, and mourned with his friends when he died in the ICU. From then on, it became my mission to learn more about cystic fibrosis and to do everything I could to improve the lives of CFers and their families. The following year, I was elected to become the Co-Captain of Streetlight's CF Team by my peers. Since then, I have edited the CF Yearbook (a way for CFers to meet adult staff before they transition from pediatric to adult care, as well as read the stories of others who have transitioned before them), designed a CF Newsletter for distribution in adult and pediatric CF clinics, maintained and revamped VoiceBox (www.voicebox.ning.com, the only peer-to-peer online social network designed specifically for teens with CF), designed CF T-Shirts for the Streetlight Team, patients, and hospital staff, oversaw several fundraisers to assist underprivileged patients, and I have even met with the national Cystic Fibrosis Foundation to discuss our CF Team transition programs at Shands. Currently, I am working with pediatric nutrition to revamp their meal voucher program for CFers. Also, I have been conducting research for the past year studying the Streetlight palliative care model and, specifically, our transition programs for CF patients.

The reason I am writing you is to inform you that, on April 16, I will be walking with the Streetlight CF Team for "Great Strides". We will be walking a 10K, starting 8AM, at Albert Ray Massey Park in Gainesville, Florida. Great Strides is a national event, sponsored by the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation (CFF), with one goal: raising money to find a CURE for CF. The CFF is one of the most efficiently run non-profit organizations in existence, and they are getting ever close to finding a cure. CF is a genetic disease affecting 30,000 people in the US and over 70,000 nationwide. The disease primarily affects the lungs and the pancreas, making it increasingly difficult to breathe and digest food. In 1955, the life expectancy for individuals diagnosed with CF was 5. In 1981, the life expectancy reached 20 years. Currently, the median life expectancy for CF is 38.5. We are truly making "great strides" in fighting this terrible disease, but I am asking for your help. There is no reason why we cannot eradicate CF from the face of the Earth. *Any* amount that you can donate will be greatly appreciated and all contributions are 100 percent tax deductible. The easiest way to donate is through my Great Strides page: http://www.cff.org/Great_Strides/RyanBerger. If you would like to write a check, you can make it payable to the "Cystic Fibrosis Foundation". Also, if you know of anyone else who would like to donate to this cause, please forward him or her this letter on my behalf. I sincerely appreciate your support and generosity and I will keep you posted on my progress. Please contact me with any questions or if you would like to learn more about CF or the Streetlight Program.

Warmest regards,

Ryan Berger
rberger@ufl.edu
954.253.1185