Yaman, 3 years old, with his sister Zekra (Diagnosis – Atypical Teratoid/Rhabdoid Tumor aka ATRT).

2025–26
ANNUAL

making headway foundation

A Foundation Dedicated to the Care, Comfort, and Cure of Children with Brain and Spinal Cord Tumors

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MAKING HEADWAY FOUNDATION

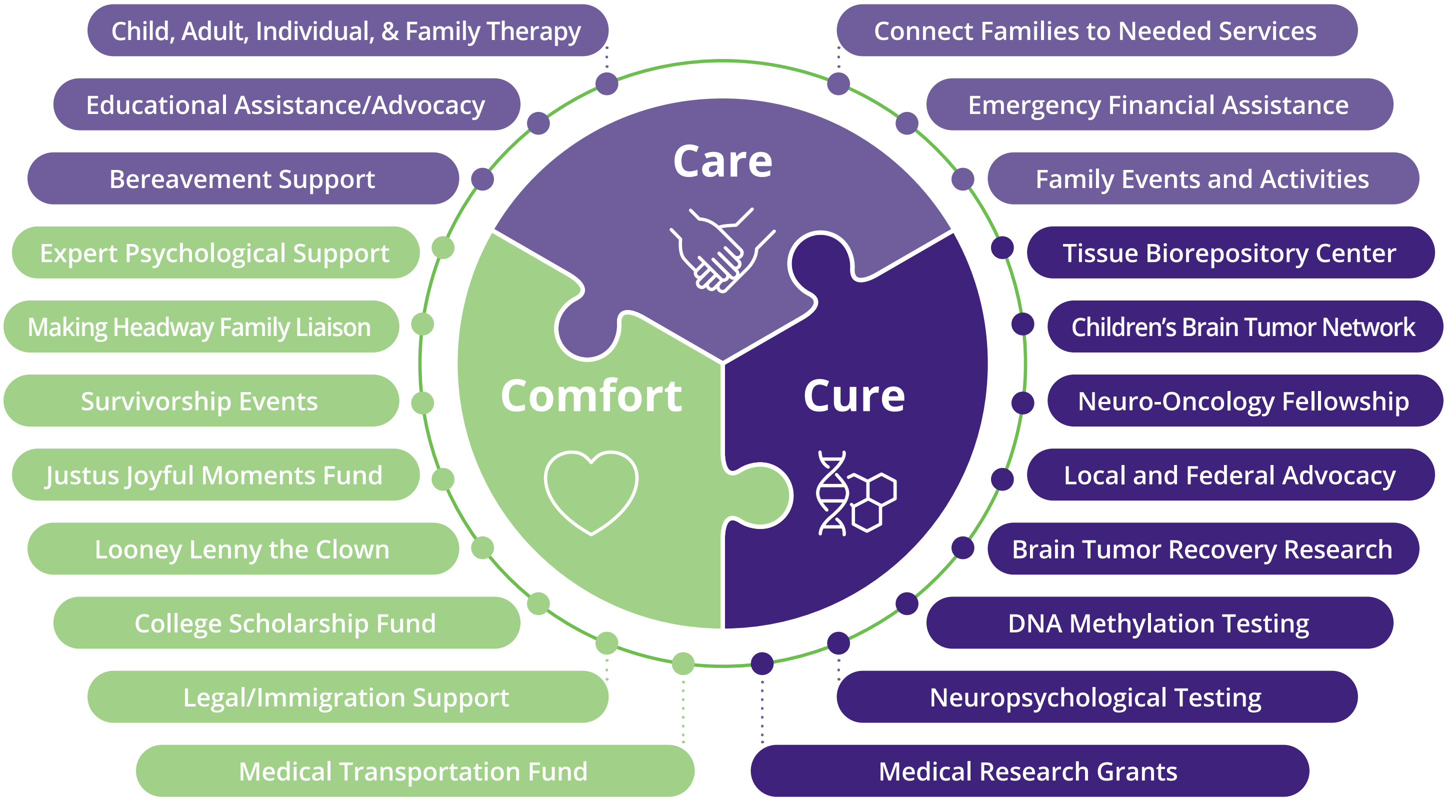
Our Mission: Making Headway Foundation provides care and comfort for children with brain and spinal cord tumors while funding medical research geared to better treatments and a cure.

For almost 30 years, Making Headway has been driven by a deep and unwavering commitment to children with brain and spinal cord tumors and the families who love them. Over these decades, we have continually grown, strengthened, and expanded our programs to meet the changing needs of children with a brain or spinal cord tumor.

At the heart of everything we do is our guiding principles: Care, Comfort, and Cure. These are not just words, but the foundation of our work and the spirit that shapes every program, every interaction, and every decision we make. From the moment a child is diagnosed with a brain or spinal cord tumor, a family's world is turned upside down. We are there from the very beginning, offering not only resources and support, but compassion, understanding, and true partnership. Our passion also extends beyond today's needs to tomorrow's possibilities. We support critical research laboratories, champion innovation, and push forward in the search for better treatments and, ultimately, a cure for pediatric brain and spinal cord tumors.

Since 1996, Making Headway has stood beside thousands of families, offering strength in times of uncertainty, comfort in moments of hardship, and hope for the future. This work is more than our mission; it is our calling, our purpose, and our promise to every child and family we serve.

WHAT MAKES MAKING HEADWAY **SPECIAL**



- Child, Adult, Individual, & Family Therapy
- Educational Assistance/Advocacy
- Bereavement Support
- Expert Psychological Support
- Making Headway Family Liaison
- Survivorship Events
- Justus Joyful Moments Fund
- Looney Lenny the Clown
- College Scholarship Fund
- Legal/Immigration Support
- Medical Transportation Fund

- Connect Families to Needed Services
- Emergency Financial Assistance
- Family Events and Activities
- Tissue Biorepository Center
- Children's Brain Tumor Network
- Neuro-Oncology Fellowship
- Local and Federal Advocacy
- Brain Tumor Recovery Research
- DNA Methylation Testing
- Neuropsychological Testing
- Medical Research Grants

All Making Headway programs, services, activities, and events are always provided free of charge.

LETTER FROM OUR **CHAIR**

After a month in the hospital for all of baby Jake's surgeries, Elisa holds him at home.

The First Making Headway Poster Child — Jake Greenbaum

What you couldn't see under Jake's baby hats, and later under his wavy curls, were the multiple scars from his brain tumor surgeries and a tube winding down the back of his neck from a permanent brain shunt. On his wrists were cutdowns for IVs that had to be performed when he was a pudgy three month old. Plus, it took over four years of work for Jake to be able to walk on his own. Jake also couldn't talk and had significant learning disabilities, but he always had a very advanced and robust sense of humor. His language was his smile, his exuberance, and of course, his trademark squeals of joy and laughter. Our son, Jake, embodied the cause, the mission, and the inspiration of Making Headway.

It's been five years since Jake died, but we are still constantly reminded how Jake inspired so many. In memory of Jake and in honor of all the Making Headway children, in 2025 we launched the Making Headway Poster Child initiative. Why? We feel it is important for donors to understand that behind our cause are real children, with faces (probably with some scars), families, and stories. Jake is our first annual poster child—that is his lasting legacy. Thanks for your continued support.

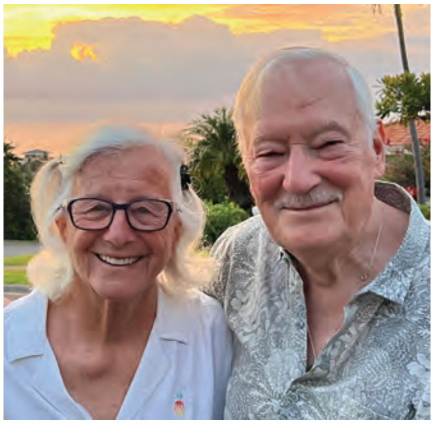
Stay well,
Elisa Greenbaum

Elisa Greenbaum

FROM THE **FOUNDERS**

"Why is everything on the menu listed twice?" This was the question posed by our daughter Cynthia in 1981 while vacationing out west with our family. She was experiencing double vision, and we knew immediately that something was wrong. On returning home, and after many tests, we were given the diagnosis of a brain tumor. The tumor, pressing on her optic nerve, had caused the noticeable disturbances to her vision. And so started our difficult journey with surgery, chemo, radiation, turning what had been an "idyllic" family life upside down.

Due to good insurance, we were able to get Cynthia the best care available. We were also fortunate enough to be able to afford the many services we needed after she left the hospital including therapists, educational consultants, and tutors. But that got us wondering; what do other families do who are less fortunate?



That was the main reason we established Making Headway in 1996, and since then have dedicated our efforts to make the journey easier for families in a similar situation. The past 30 years have been extremely satisfying for us, starting a foundation from scratch and building an organization that is able to assist so many families each year in a multitude of ways. In reading this report, we hope you will learn more about our mission, our successes, and how you can help us to continue on our path.

With warm regards,
Maya and Edward Manley

Edward P. Manley Maya

A LETTER FROM OUR **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

At the Making Headway Foundation, I am continually inspired by the extraordinary courage and honesty of the children and families we serve. A diagnosis of a brain or spinal cord tumor is an overwhelming challenge, yet the resilience, strength, and love demonstrated by these children and their parents are truly remarkable. Their perseverance reminds me why Making Headway's work is so important and why I must remain committed to supporting our families in every way possible.

Seeing the courage and resilience of these families up close reminds me that Making Headway's role is not just to provide aid, but to walk alongside them through the milestones, the uncertainty, and all the moments that define their journey. This is why our mission extends beyond medical grants. We provide families with practical assistance, emotional guidance, and resources that help them navigate the complexities of treatment and life. From hospital stays to therapy sessions, from moments of uncertainty to small victories, we seek to ease the burdens these families carry and to honor the dedication and commitment they show to one another.

It is a privilege to witness the strength and determination of these families. Their courage motivates every program we offer, every resource we provide, and every initiative we pursue. At Making Headway, we are proud to stand alongside them, offering hope, support, and guidance through every step of their journey.

Daniel Lipka, Executive Director

Every day, I make countless decisions, some better than others. The ones I value most are those that improve the happiness and quality of life for others. When I make a choice that has a clear, positive impact, I feel a deep sense of fulfillment. It's a feeling I want to hold onto forever and etch into my memory like the face of someone I love.

Each time you support Making Headway, you can create one of those powerful, life-affirming moments. Think for a moment about your last donation: you chose to take your hard-earned money and help a child diagnosed with a brain or spinal cord tumor. That was the right decision. Making Headway Foundation is a focused, dedicated, and financially responsible nonprofit that ensures your support directly helps families in need. You are part of this mission, and in a challenging world, that is truly something to feel proud of.

WHY **SURVIVORSHIP MATTERS**

Each year, thousands of kids are diagnosed with brain tumors—the leading cause of cancer-related death in children. Fortunately, advances in medical treatment have greatly improved these children's chances of survival. Yet the need for healing does not end when treatment is over. As more children survive their initial diagnosis, the focus must shift from short-term outcomes to long-term survivorship care. Making Headway understands how survivorship programs play a critical role in ensuring these children receive the support they need to thrive into adulthood.

Pediatric brain tumors are often treated aggressively, targeting the disease with surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. While these treatments save lives, they can also cause long-term complications, including learning disabilities and memory problems, hormonal imbalances and growth delays, seizures, vision or hearing loss, emotional and mental health challenges, secondary cancers, and chronic illnesses. Survivors also may face difficulty returning to school, forming relationships, or entering the workforce. Many continue to struggle in silence, often falling through the cracks once the hospital visits stop.

Survivorship programs are designed to address the myriad challenges pediatric cancer survivors may face. Yet despite their proven value, these programs often operate with limited funding. Many families do not have access to specialized follow-up care due to geographic, institutional, or financial limitations. When you support Making Headway and our long-term survivorship programs, you're doing more than funding care—you're giving survivors the tools they need to live full, meaningful lives. You're helping a child walk not just out of the hospital, but into a future filled with potential.

Grace Sturm with her family. She was diagnosed with a brain tumor in 2009.

MAKING HEADWAY ACCOMPLISHMENTS: BY THE NUMBERS

For the past 30 years, Making Headway has touched the lives of thousands of families. While we strive to capture our impact through surveys and patient stories, reviewing the numbers does help showcase many aspects of our work. Below are some of our key measurable achievements.

Direct or indirect support to over
2,344
families

8,550+
hours of educational advocacy services

17,200+
hours of individual and family counseling

201
college scholarships

More than
85
events for families

Invested over
$30m
in grants, services, programs, and events for families impacted by a childhood brain or spinal cord tumor

Over
70
published research papers as a direct result of our grants

87,500+
donations, from more than
27,000
unique households

10
pediatric Neuro-Oncology fellowships fully funded

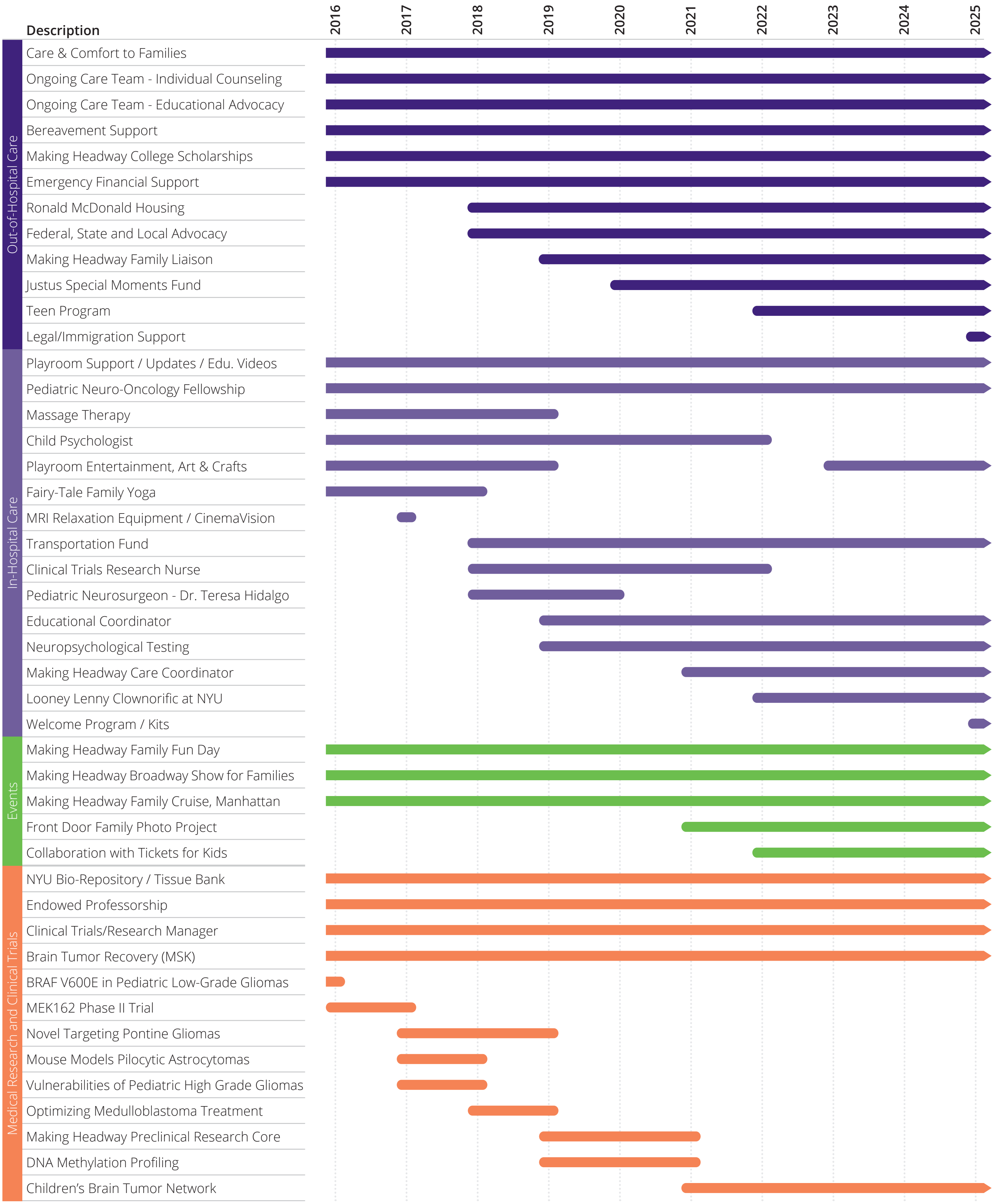
Funded over
174
research and quality-of-life programs at local hospitals

Assisted families from
10
major children's hospitals

Financial support for over
201
funerals

87%
of all donations have gone directly to programs and services

30 YEAR TIMELINE OF MAKING HEADWAY



FAMILY **FUN DAY**

On June 8, 2025, Making Headway Foundation hosted its 30th annual Family Fun Day. The event, held at Dave & Buster's in Brooklyn, welcomed over 400 attendees, including survivors, siblings, parents, caregivers, and volunteers, for a much-needed day of laughter, play, and community. Guests enjoyed unlimited access to video games, participated in arts and crafts, had their faces painted, laughed at the antics of our clowns, and shared a delicious lunch. Thanks to the generosity of our partners—Spin Master, Adidas, and LeSportsac—families also took home exciting gifts and toys. Family Fun Day is one of many ways Making Headway supports families affected by childhood brain and spinal cord tumors. It's a chance for everyone to come together outside of hospitals to simply enjoy each other's company in a joyful, supportive environment.

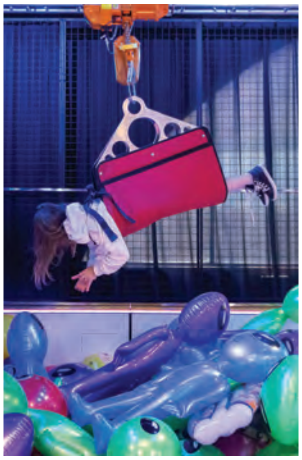


Photo Credit: Vlad Kolesnikov

> "I wanted to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude for organizing such an incredible Family Day! It was truly a blessing to meet and connect with so many other uniquely abled families who understand and share our journey. Your kindness, support, and dedication to creating a sense of community and belonging for families like mine are truly inspiring. I'm so grateful for the opportunity to be part of this community and for all that you do to make a difference in our lives. Thank you again for an unforgettable experience!" —*Tracey Jackson (mother of Tristian)*

A **MAGICAL** BROADWAY EVENT

Besides being our largest fundraiser, Making Headway's Annual Spring Broadway show is also one of our biggest family events. On April 6, 2025, Making Headway welcomed over 400 guests to a special showing of *The Magic City* at the New Victory Theater. It was a fascinating, one-of-a-kind experience. The audience watched the back of the stage as the cast performed a live show with puppetry and shadow play that was projected onto a video screen. The plot involved the fantastical adventures of two step-siblings in a "magic city" that they created. Themes dealing with adapting to life's changes made it especially poignant and thought-provoking. It was wildly creative and our guests—especially the kids—loved it. As an extra bonus, the New Victory Theater offered free arts and crafts activities before and after the show. Making Headway is so grateful to all our donors who sponsored tickets for families to be part of this wonderful afternoon. Thank you!

Making Headway's co-founders, staff, and families get together after seeing *The Magic City*.

FAMILY CARE AWARD

Emma, Rachel, and Oliver Justus

For the past five years, the Justus family has opened their hearts and given their all to brighten the lives of children and families living with the impact of childhood brain and spinal cord tumors. They do this to honor David Justus, who believed that life should not be measured by time but by joyful moments. After David passed away from a brain tumor in 2020, his wife Rachel, daughter Emma, and son Oliver established the David Justus Joyful Moments Fund at Making Headway, ensuring that families could create treasured memories of their own. In addition to inspiring over 1,000 donations, each member of the Justus family has given their personal time, their voice, and their hearts to help as many children as possible. For their incredible dedication and ongoing impact, Making Headway Foundation is extremely proud to present the entire Justus family with our 4th Annual Family Care Award. The David Justus Joyful Moments Fund has allowed Making Headway to expand our mission like never before. Now we can always say "yes" to children and families looking to create special memories. Family photo sessions with a professional photographer? Yes (20 times)! Birthday parties? Yes! Celebrations at water parks, Broadway shows, and arcade passes? Yes, Yes, and Yes! Anything else? Yes! The Making Headway Family Care Award is a symbol of gratitude and partnership, but it is also a reminder of the lasting difference one family can make when they choose to act with love and purpose. On behalf of the children and families we serve, we thank the entire Justus family for their generosity, their leadership, and their unwavering dedication to serving others.

Sincerely, The Making Headway Staff and Board of Directors

CARE AWARD

PRESENTED TO DR. JEAN DONNELLY

Making Headway is delighted to announce Dr. Jean Donnelly as the fifth recipient of our annual Care Award. This honor is given to a professional who exemplifies Making Headway's mission and our dedication to children with brain or spinal cord tumors. Over the past 27 years, as a staff member at the Institute for Neurology and Neurosurgery and as a member of our Ongoing Care Team, she has provided thousands of hours of compassionate psychological care and healing directly to Making Headway families. Her unwavering dedication has eased the pain of countless families during life's most difficult moments. With deep gratitude, we honor her extraordinary impact.

> "The almost 27 years that I have worked with Making Headway have enriched my life immeasurably. The families who travel the treacherous road through illness are inspiring: children who endure misfortune with strength and grace, parents who model selfless dedication. They have convinced me that there is more good in this world than most of us could ever imagine."
> —*Dr. Jean Donnelly*

MAKING HEADWAY WELCOMES A **NEW BOARD MEMBER**

In 2025, Dr. Jeffrey Wisoff joined the Making Headway Board of Directors. Dr. Wisoff recently retired as a Professor of Neurosurgery and Pediatrics and is past Director of the Division of Pediatric Neurosurgery at the NYU Langone Medical Center. He also served as the long-time leader of Neurosurgery at the Children's Oncology Group. Over the last 40 years, Dr. Wisoff has made major innovative contributions to the surgical treatment of neurological disorders in children; in particular to the treatment of brain tumors, Chiari malformations, hydrocephalus and craniosynostosis. A leader in both surgery and research, Dr. Wisoff has helped shape national treatment protocols and authored more than 150 scientific papers.

Dr. Wisoff is nationally recognized for his surgical expertise, as well as the compassionate way he cares for children and their families. He takes the time to explain complex diagnoses in clear, reassuring terms, guiding families through each step of treatment with patience and empathy. In the operating room, his skill has given countless children the chance at longer, healthier lives, while in the clinic, he is equally devoted to supporting their emotional well-being. His approach combines cutting-edge medicine with a deep understanding of the challenges families face, ensuring that every child receives both expert care and genuine kindness.

Over his career, Dr. Wisoff has worked with thousands of children with brain or spinal cord tumors. This experience, and his compassion for each family, makes Dr. Wisoff an ideal addition to our Board of Directors.

CELEBRATING THE MAKING HEADWAY **COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP CLASS OF 2025**

Making Headway Foundation is proud to honor 23 incredible young survivors of brain and spinal cord tumors who are now taking the next step toward achieving their dreams of higher education. Each student received a scholarship ranging from $750 to $15,000, providing vital support as they pursue their college degrees. These awards are more than just financial assistance—they are a celebration of resilience, hope, and determination.

Two of the scholarships were made possible through the Scott J. Reisser Memorial Scholarship Fund, which honors the memory of Scott, a 22-year-old who tragically passed away from a brain tumor just short of completing his own college journey. One special $15,000 award was funded by donations raised by the Schwartz family in honor of their son, Michael, a 28-year-old brain cancer survivor whose strength continues to inspire. The remainder of the scholarships were funded by the generosity of Making Headway's incredible community of donors. Thank you for believing in the dreams of these extraordinary students!

SCHOLARSHIP WINNER	DIAGNOSIS
Lily Adkins	Brain Tumor at 14 months old
Predeline Benoit	Low Grade Midbrain Glioma
John Criscuoli	Stage 4 Neuroblastoma as a baby
Owen Dodd	Right Thalamic Brain Tumor at 3 years old
Dean Gavin	Primitive Neuroectodermal Tumor at 8 years old
Katherine Hanson	Optic Pathway Glioma at 2 1/2 years old
Melany Jurado	Brain Tumor and Neurofibromatosis (NF)
Amethyst Michelangelo	Mixed Germ Cell Tumor at 18 years old
Grace Pantano	Pilocytic Astrocytoma at 9 years old
Renata Scorza Muniz	Brain Tumor at 11 years old
Jack Solits	Subependymoma at 10 years old
Elizabeth Wilson	Neurofibromatosis (NF) at 5 years old
Cairo Archer	Neurofibromatosis (NF) as a baby
Kyla Coughlin	Stage 3 Ependymoma at 2 years old
Jordi De Jesus Martinez	Myxopapillary Ependymoma at 13 years old
Elaina Dub	Fibrillary Astrocytoma at 3 years old
Jack Garzon	Malignant Germ Cell Tumor at 8 years old
Anselm Juan	Intracranial Germinoma Tumor at 10 years old
Nikita Korzhenko	Benign Stage 1 Sarcoma at 14 years old
Lola Moerschell	Ganglioglioma (Brain Tumor) at 16 years old
Annalise Piano	Pilocytic Astrocytoma at 11 years old
Hubert Skwara	Pilocytic Astrocytoma at 3 years old
Nadine Whalen	Medulloblastoma at 18 years old

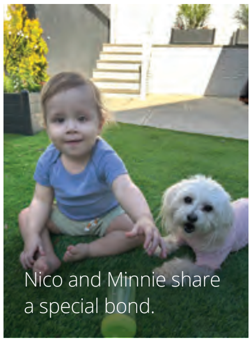
"Being chosen as the recipient for this scholarship is truly a blessing. This scholarship carries a deep and personal significance in my journey. It is a reminder of my resilience and strength and how my story matters. This scholarship acknowledges all of the challenges and obstacles I have faced and all of the strength it took to get where I am today. This opportunity inspires me to keep pushing forward and to give hope to all those who are fighting brain tumors."
—Grace Pantano, Michael Schwartz Making Headway Scholarship award winner

"This scholarship gives me the chance to continue pursuing what I love and reminds me how far I've come since my diagnosis. Surviving brain cancer at a young age taught me how fragile life is, and it pushed me to make the most of every opportunity. Being recognized for my hard work and determination means a lot, especially as I start my next chapter studying evolution and ecology at Ohio State." *—Dean Gavin*

Since Making Headway Foundation started awarding college scholarships in 2008, we have distributed 202 awards, totaling over $1,000,000, to young adults who have survived a brain or spinal cord tumor.

ONE YEAR SINCE OUR HEARTS SHATTERED

By the Bonet Family


Nico and Minnie share a special bond.

A day after our baby boy turned 6 months, a routine appointment became an emergency room visit where we learned our son, Nico, had pediatric brain cancer. In the year since, he's endured five surgeries, countless treatments, and unimaginable challenges—all with a smile. His bravery has shown us what true courage looks like.

And through it all, our sweet dog Minnie has been his protector and cheerleader. She comforts Nico when he cries, motivates him during therapies, and showers him with unconditional love. She's been the best big sister. Sharing the joy she brings us with others on social media has also become a therapeutic bit of lightness for us. Maybe she can do the same for you – www.instagram.com/minniepennyb.

For the 1st anniversary of Nico's diagnosis, we've shared our story to raise awareness and support organizations like Making Headway, who have supported us through this fight. They've provided us with resources, comfort, and hope, and we want to pay it forward. In honor of Nico's milestone, we ask that you consider donating to this incredible organization at www.MakingHeadway.org/donate. Thank you for standing with us.

SEEING THE UNSEEN

By Max Chwatko

To most people, things like feathers, rainbows, or objects found on the street are ordinary. But to me, they can carry a different kind of meaning. Six years ago, when I was ten, I lost my younger sister Scarlett to brain cancer. She was only eight, and she was my best friend. Her absence left a silence I didn't know how to fill. At the time, I leaned on logic to make sense of what had happened. So when my mom said certain things were "signs" from Scarlett, I felt frustrated. It seemed like wishful thinking, and I didn't understand how something so painful could be comforted by small, random moments.

But over time something shifted. Now, I notice the little things. A rainbow reflection in the form of the letter M just before my SAT. A butterfly landing on me on her birthday. A tiny Eiffel Tower charm beneath my foot while visiting the college I hope to attend, (Scarlett had always dreamed of going to Paris). Bright feathers often appear during walks with my dog, standing out like they were left there for a reason. My dog herself came to us quite by accident, through an unbelievable and inexplicable series of luck and mishaps, arriving on Scarlett's birthday, our first without her. None of these moments are loud or dramatic, but they no longer feel like coincidences either.

I used to think believing in signs meant refusing to accept reality. Now, I believe it means choosing to see beauty in it. These reminders of Scarlett bring me peace. They help me carry her with me, not just in memory, but in motion. She may not be here the way she once was, but in these small, quiet ways, I know she still is.

IN MEMORY OF THOSE WHO PASSED

Each year, more than 500 children in the United States lose their lives to brain or spinal cord tumors. Twenty two of these children were beloved members of the Making Headway family. We hold their memories close and honor the precious lives we lost over the past 12 months.

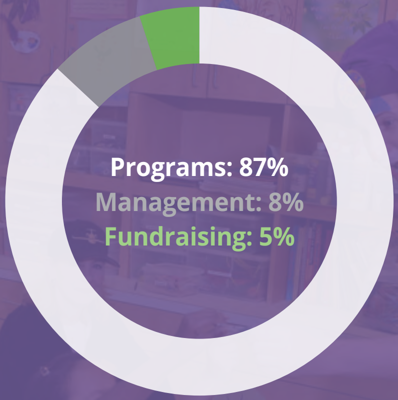
Alexandra
Anson
Brandon
Carly
Eden
Harlem
Jasmina
Jeremiah
Josh
Khari
Kylie
Morgan
Natalie
Nikki
Satya
Shanna
Siya
Tomas
Victor
Yosef
Zakariya
Zara

FINANCIAL
SUMMARY 2025

Revenue	**$1,706,351**
Winter Show	$583,518
General Contributions	$387,731
Talbot Fund	$336,592
Grants Received	$108,993
Other Fundraising Events/Activities	$66,763
Trusts and Bequests	$50,000
Interest/Unrealized Gains/Other	$172,754

Expenses	**$1,285,532**
Making Headway Program and Support Staff	$389,440
Research Grants	
Research Labs	$25,000
CBTN, & NYU Biorepository	$20,790
Patient Support Programs	
Individual Counseling/Therapy	$336,216
Educational Coordinator/ School Advocacy	$30,271
Direct Patient Support	$70,242
Playroom / Entertainment	$25,688
Events and Other Programs	
College Scholarships	$70,848
Family & Survivorship Events	$104,715
Funeral Expenses	$45,491
Advocacy & Other Programs	$7,725
Other Expenses	
Supplies / Printing / Copying / Postage	$50,153
Outside Services / Technology / Outreach	$33,970
Office Rent / Insurance / Professional Fees	$61,672
Fundraising Events & Expenses	$13,311

Notes: Unaudited financial data as of March 1, 2026 (accrued basis).



87%
of our total budget goes directly to programs, services, or research.

In 2025, Making Headway increased our direct support to patients and their families.

All Making Headway programs, services, activities, and events are always provided free of charge.

Hannah with her Dad aboard the Skyline Princess at Making Headway's Annual Family Cruise. Hannah, who is now 4 years old, was diagnosed with a right optic glioma two years ago.

Amethyst Michelangelo, Making Headway College Scholarship Class of 2025

Sophia Shvartsman, and her siblings, along with Making Headway Co-Founder Maya Manley, at our 2025 family cruise event.

making headway foundation

A Foundation Dedicated to the Care, Comfort, and Cure of Children with Brain and Spinal Cord Tumors

Making Headway Foundation provides care and comfort for children with brain and spinal cord tumors, while funding medical research geared to better treatments and a cure.

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Daniel Lipka, Executive Director
Jennifer Samuels, Office Manager
Maureen Isaia, Family Liaison

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Oren Becher, MD, Division Chief Pediatric Hematology Oncology, Mount Sinai Health System
James Garvin, MD, Pediatric Hematologist Oncologist, NY-Presbyterian Morgan Stanley Children's Hospital

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Making Headway services are available to pediatric brain and spinal cord tumor patients and their families throughout the tri-state area.

This newsletter is dedicated to our donors and supporters, whom we celebrate every day.

Managing Editor
Robin Hardman

Making Headway is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. EIN# 13-3906297.