making headway foundation

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

makingnews

Winter 2025

HIGHLIGHTS

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INVESTMENT IN PEDIATRIC NEUROSURGERY • ADVOCACY • CHILDREN WHO HAVE PASSED • SAVE THE DATE •
COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS • FAMILY CARE AWARD • EVENTS • WELCOMING DR. WISOFF •
SUPPORTING OUR WORK • REAL FAMILIES REAL IMPACT

Dilara Coker aboard the Skyline Princess at Making Headway's Annual Family Cruise. Dilara, 10 years old, enjoys one of Maya Manley's custom cupcakes. Last year, she was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, a type of pediatric central nervous system (CNS) brain tumor.

Photo credit: Justine Cooper Photography

www.makingheadway.org

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. Throughout his ordeal, Jake was incredible! He just wanted to smile and laugh. As a result, my husband Clint and I couldn't cry. Our job was to keep Jake happy. Another major undertaking was to join with Maya and Edward Manley to create and sustain the Making Headway Foundation, which will celebrate its 30th anniversary this October.

It's been five years since Jake died, but we are still constantly reminded how Jake inspired so many: we are reminded by his many young helpers, some of whom became doctors and therapists; by his

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FROM THE **FOUNDERS**

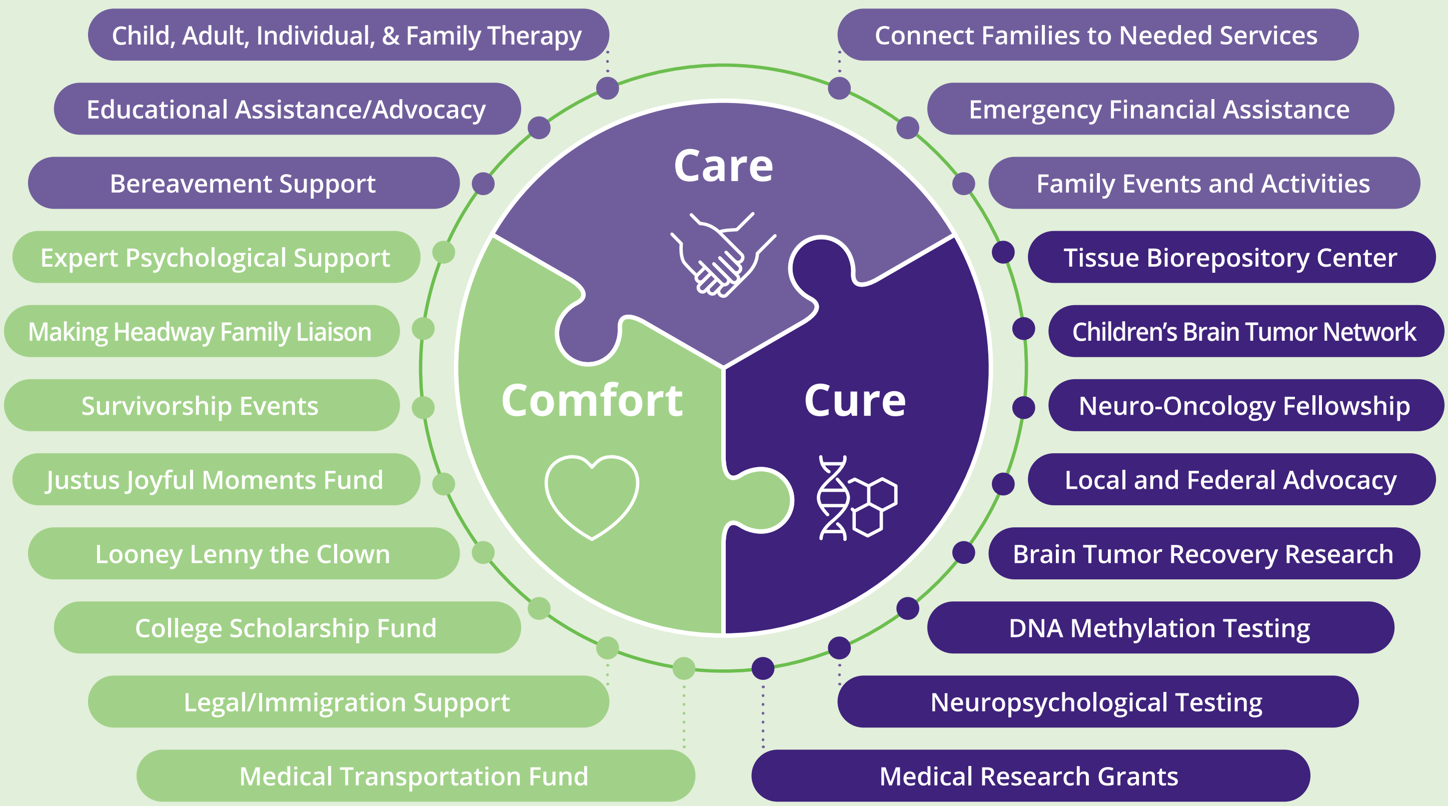
For over 35 years, Maya worked as an art therapist in the day hospital playroom at NYU. She drove into the city several times a week—her car loaded with art supplies and nutritious snacks for the children and their parents—and spent the day doing crafts projects with the kids and often their siblings. During this time, she had opportunities to check in with the parents, getting to know them and learning about their particular struggles, giving them a shoulder to lean on, providing words of kindness and encouragement, and extending empathy and sympathy in the scariest of times. She would work until the clinic closed, clean up, and then fight rush hour traffic home, where I would have dinner waiting for her. Maya continued this work until COVID effectively shut down all our work at the hospital in 2020. Undeterred, Maya continued her work by phone, routinely checking in with families that were in crisis or with those needing some extra help, always offering a friendly voice.

Over the past few years, we have wanted to step back and eventually retire from active work, but it was hard to find a replacement that would embody Maya's spirit, sense of empathy, and engagement both inside and outside the hospital. But in Maureen Isaia, Making Headway's Family Liaison, we found exactly the right person. Because of her extensive experience as an LCSW and her many years in the medical field, Maureen is swiftly able to assess a family's needs and how we can best help them. Maureen helps families obtain Therapy or Educational services with our Ongoing Care Team, connects them with Legal Assistance for immigration concerns when the need arises, helps them obtain financial assistance when things are dire, provides information and support during hospital visits, and provides comfort and kindness during her routine check-ins with families. She has proven to be a most welcome addition to the Making Headway Team. Making Headway Families—if you have not yet met or spoken with Maureen, we heartily encourage you to do so!

Edward P. Manley Maya ♡

From left to right: Edward Manley, Maya Manley, Audrey Manley, and Maureen Isaia

ABOUT MAKING HEADWAY



- 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

WALKING ALONGSIDE FAMILIES ON THEIR JOURNEY

By Preeti Saigal, PhD, Making Headway Ongoing Care Team Member and Pediatric Neuropsychologist

For more than 15 years, I had the privilege of working at NYU Langone with children, adolescents, and families facing a wide range of medical conditions, including many affected by brain and spinal cord tumors. During that time, I collaborated closely with Making Headway Foundation, learning firsthand what true resilience looks like. Returning now as part of the Ongoing Care Team feels like coming home to a community that has long inspired me.

As a psychologist and neuropsychologist, my role is to support the emotional, social, and cognitive well-being of children and young adults with complex medical histories. These young people face challenges that extend far beyond the hospital walls: re-adjusting to school; managing friendships; coping with anxiety or attention difficulties; and simply trying to feel "normal" and like themselves at every stage of the journey. My work involves not only using evidence-based therapeutic approaches but also cultivating an individualized understanding of each child's developmental profile and lived experience.

What I am continually reminded of is that these families are my teachers. They show me what it means to hold onto joy and humor in the midst of difficulty, and how courage often looks like the small, everyday steps forward. It is an honor to help them feel seen, understood, and supported—not just as patients, but as whole people with passions, strengths, and futures worth celebrating.

I am grateful to Making Headway for ensuring that families have access to this kind of care. Their commitment allows clinicians like me to step in at moments when support can make all the difference—whether that means helping a teenager find strategies to manage school stress, guiding parents through transitions, or offering space for siblings to share their feelings.

The journey of a brain tumor diagnosis is never easy—whether during active treatment, coping with uncertainty, or in survivorship—but it does not have to be traveled alone. Making Headway makes sure of that, and I am privileged to walk alongside families as they navigate both the hardships and the moments of growth.

MAKING HEADWAY'S ANNUAL FAMILY CRUISE— A DAY OF JOY ON THE WATER

On September 14, 185 people whose lives have been touched by a childhood brain or spinal cord tumor stepped aboard the *Skyline Princess* for an unforgettable afternoon. For four hours, families cruised along the East River, taking in the sights of the UN Building, the Brooklyn Bridge, and the Statue of Liberty. Guests were also treated to a special water show, courtesy of the FDNY. None of it would have been possible without the incredible generosity of the Stadtmauer family, whose support makes this day of joy and togetherness possible, year after year. For 19 years, this tradition has given families a space to connect and be part of a community, surrounded by others who truly understand.


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.


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


Making Headway families having fun after Looney Lenny's show.


Mark, 5 years old, with his parents Dima and Iryna (Diagnosis – Ependymoma).


Looney Lenny performs a special magic show.


Special thanks to the FDNY for the amazing water show!

Photo credit: Justine Cooper Photography

AN ENDURING PARTNERSHIP TO HEAL CHILDREN WITH BRAIN TUMORS

In 2018, Making Headway Foundation funded a very significant three-year grant to train and keep one of the best young pediatric neurosurgeons in our area. Our goal was to equip a specially selected and uniquely qualified doctor with the training and resources to be a leader in their field, helping to heal the next generation of children with a brain or spinal cord tumor. Dr. Teresa Hidalgo was not only an exceptionally talented neurosurgeon, teacher, and investigator; in addition, her dedication to caring for children represented the very best of Making Headway and our mission.

Looking back, this grant and our investments were a tremendous success. Over the past seven years, Dr. Hidalgo has become the Director of Clinical Research in Pediatric Neurosurgery at NYU Langone, published 45 medical research papers, performed hundreds of surgeries on children, and saved countless lives. We asked Dr. Hidalgo to share her perspective on her career to date and the role Making Headway has played.

IN HER OWN WORDS — DR. TERESA HIDALGO, PEDIATRIC NEUROSURGEON

"When I reflect on my career so far, what stands out most are not the surgeries or published research, but the faces—the children and families who entrusted us with their care. The strength and resilience shown by families of children with brain tumors humbles and inspires me every day. I feel profoundly privileged to work in one of the most extraordinary places in the world, surrounded by dedicated individuals who share a common mission: ensuring that every child facing a brain or spinal cord tumor receives not only world-class medical treatment but also compassion, understanding, and hope.

Before moving to the US from Switzerland, I had heard about Making Headway through my mentor, Dr. Karl Kothbauer, a distinguished pediatric neurosurgeon in New York. He spoke admiringly of this incredible foundation, which supports families with children suffering from brain and spinal cord tumors, offering guidance, counseling, and joyful celebrations. Meeting the founders, Maya and Edward Manley, was a turning point—I immediately felt their warmth and genuine care, and understood why their impact was so deeply felt. Their unwavering support truly advances care, outcomes, and quality of life for so many.

Early in my journey at NYU Langone Health, Making Headway played a transformative role in my professional development. Their generous support for my position as a pediatric neurosurgeon enabled me to dedicate my career to helping children with brain and spinal tumors. Their belief in me set everything in motion: advancing clinical care, supporting innovative research, and improving outcomes for young patients. Their steadfast partnership was the catalyst for so much progress.

As my career evolved, I realized that surgery alone was not enough. I wanted to understand why some children did better than others, and how we could tailor treatment for each unique case. With the ongoing support of Making Headway, I pursued a Master's in Clinical Investigation, which equipped me to design impactful studies. Our research, now published in leading journals, focuses on improving safety, reducing side effects, and helping children lead fuller, healthier lives after treatment. None of this progress would have been possible without the foundation's support.

Today, as Director of Clinical Research for the Division of Pediatric Neurosurgery, I have the privilege of mentoring young physicians and fostering a culture of curiosity and collaboration. We continually collect data, analyze outcomes, and strive to improve—always motivated by a commitment to better care for children and families, now and in the future.

Most importantly, Making Headway's unwavering commitment extends far beyond the hospital. Their continuous support reaches every family, inspiring us all to remember that no child faces their diagnosis alone, and that hope is never out of reach.

Looking ahead, I am filled with gratitude and hope. Advances in imaging, molecular diagnostics, and precision surgery are opening exciting new frontiers. Yet the heart of our mission remains unchanged: to give every child the best possible chance—not just to survive, but to thrive, flourish, and reach their full potential.

A decade later, I see the full circle of Making Headway's impact in every recovery, every family's smile, and every young doctor inspired to make a difference. I am tremendously grateful to be part of this story of healing, discovery, and hope—with Making Headway as an essential partner in transforming lives and advancing the future of pediatric neuro-oncology.

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. Thirty five 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.

Alexander
Alexandra
Anson
Billy
Brandon B.
Brandon M.
Carly
Daniel
Don
Genesis
Harlem
James
Jasmina
Jeffrey
Jeremiah
Joseph
Josh
Khari
Kylie
Luis
Morgan
Natalie
Nathalie
Nikki
Penelope
Richard
Satya
Shanna
Siya
Susan
Tomas
Victor
Yaeliz
Zakariya
Zara

BILLS IN CONGRESS CAN HELP KIDS WITH CANCER

There are so many ways you can help a child with a brain or spinal cord tumor. You can volunteer, raise awareness, or donate to Making Headway. But there is another critical way you can support these kids: advocate for important state and federal legislation that increases investments in research, directly helps families, and creates a platform for future medical discoveries. Here are some examples:

The Give Kids a Chance Act (H.R.1262/S.932) addresses the most pressing research needs of children with cancer by extending research incentives, ensuring children with cancer have access to the newest cures, and guaranteeing that pediatric studies happen in a timely manner.

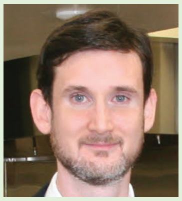
The Accelerating Kids' Access to Care Act (H.R.1509/S.752) reduces delays in accessing time-sensitive, specialized out-of-state care for patients covered by Medicaid. This is especially important for children with rare brain tumors who require expert care that is only available out of state.

The BRAIN Act (H.R.2767/S.1330) is designed to advance research, treatment, and care for brain tumor patients and survivors. It seeks to foster collaboration by creating public databases for research samples, to improve patient access to clinical trials through awareness campaigns and FDA guidance, and to expand support and funding for survivorship care programs.

The Credit for Caring Act (H.R. 2036/ S. 925) provides family caregivers with financial relief and helps offset some of the expenses they incur when taking care of a sick child or other family member. For families whose child is diagnosed with a brain tumor, the costs are especially extreme.

***It only takes a few minutes!* Making Headway Foundation is partnering with the National Brain Tumor Society to create a national advocacy effort to promote these bills. Visit MakingHeadway.org/advocacy to sign up and tell your legislators to make these bills a priority.**

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.

SAVE THE DATE: MAKING HEADWAY **ANNUAL BROADWAY SHOW**

Join Making Headway on Sunday, March 8, 2026, at 1:00 p.m. for the award-winning Broadway show *& Juliet* at the Stephen Sondheim Theatre in NYC. We'll be inviting Making Headway families to take a day off from their cares and enjoy this event for free. For everyone else, your ticket purchase or donation directly supports these families and all of the programs and services we provide. Don't miss this opportunity to join us for our biggest fundraiser of the year. Visit makingheadway.org/andJuliet for more information or to donate.

Rewrite the greatest love story ever told…on her terms

"*& Juliet* takes us on a metatheatrical journey as Anne fights with her husband William Shakespeare to rewrite 'Romeo and Juliet' with a happier ending for Juliet. Instead of dying, Juliet here learns that her beloved is a melodramatic jerk with many other lovers, and so she runs away to Paris and quickly gets embroiled in another romance…It's the most fun you'll have in a Broadway theater right now." —*Variety.com*

Making Headway Foundation is able to bring so many families to this amazing show thanks to the overwhelming support of the staff at Broadway.com.

makingheadway.org/andJuliet

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!

IN THEIR OWN WORDS — MAKING HEADWAY SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

"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*

"Winning this scholarship feels very rewarding. School has always been a struggle for me, due to my visual impairment. Whether it be needing modifications or accommodations, being pulled out of class for vision therapy, occupational therapy, and even the resource room, I've always seemed to stick out for what makes me feel 'weaker' than the rest. After receiving this scholarship, all the years of going through special services, missing school due to doctors' appointments and even just struggling with processing lessons have shown me that anyone with any ability can do anything!" —*Katherine Hanson*

"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*

"Receiving this scholarship means more to me than I can express. After being diagnosed with a brain tumor, I had to leave Florida State University just two months into my freshman year. I underwent a craniotomy, chemotherapy, and proton radiation. It was the hardest chapter of my life, but also one that taught me the true meaning of resilience. Now, as I prepare to return to FSU and restart my journey, this scholarship is a powerful symbol of hope. It reminds me how far I've come and that I'm not alone. I am extremely grateful for the Making Headway Foundation." —*Amethyst Michelangelo*

"As a lifelong learner, I am excited to pursue science in college with the hopes of becoming a doctor, making a difference in others' lives, and positively impacting my community. Knowing this path will be academically and financially challenging, receiving this scholarship makes my goals more attainable while working hard and persevering to achieve these dreams." —*Lola Moerschell*

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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.

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

LETTER FROM OUR **CHAIR**

Continued from page 2

teachers and summer camp leaders (who co-sponsor a scholarship with us for a needy camper each summer); by local Westhampton Beach businesses and institutions (Jake's caricature is on the wall of his favorite ice cream store, and plaques in his memory adorn chairs on his Main Street, his library, and his local performing arts center); and of course, by all the Making Headway donors who knew and loved him!

In memory of Jake and in honor of all the Making Headway children, we are launching a 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. While we can talk about how we help an anonymous child to do better in school, how we help a sibling deal with their little sister's illness, or how we help pay for a funeral, providing psychological counseling to ease the parent's distress and grief, it's better when you know the name and some of the story of the child that Making Headway helped. Jake is our first annual poster child—that is his lasting legacy.

Thanks for your continued support.

Stay well,
Elisa Greenbaum

Elisa Greenbaum

Be like Seth!
Physical therapist Seth Greiner (above, left) was so moved by his client, Making Headway Chair, Elisa Greenbaum's passion for her cause, that he organized the *Dinks For Headway* Pickleball Fundraiser. The September event was very generously hosted at the Westhampton Beach Tennis & Sport. The pickleball entry fee, raffles, and a silent auction raised more than $15,000 for Making Headway in memory of Jake Greenbaum. Want to duplicate this event? The Making Headway office will be glad to help.

2025 **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.

David's children, Oliver and Emma, have each had a profound impact on Making Headway and our families. Oliver, now in high school, started the Joyful Experience Team (JET), which continues to provide VIP event tickets and unforgettable experiences to children impacted by cancer. Thanks to JET, kids have enjoyed concerts, sporting events (including the Knicks, Nets, Yankees, Islanders, and professional soccer), the Big Apple Circus, and Broadway's Gazillion Bubble Show. The team has also organized fundraisers, sent care packages to hospitalized children, and raised awareness about brain tumors at school and community events. Emma, Oliver's older sister, also created her own organization, Club Care, to support families facing pediatric cancer. Club Care, which now has nine chapters throughout the world, has hosted over 25 events so far, including a cancer patient letter-writing campaign, several fundraisers, multiple hospital staff appreciation events, a Mother's Day virtual spa experience for moms of children with brain tumors, birthday parties, holiday parties with presents, bedroom makeovers, and sporting events. Oliver and Emma represent the very best of a new generation of volunteers, and through their service, they honor their father's legacy in the most meaningful way.

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

"The best part of the experience of doing projects with Making Headway is seeing the look on the families' faces when they see what we've been working on. That one moment makes all of the hard work and effort immediately worth it. My motto is, 'nothing is so bad something good can't come from it.' If I could give somebody advice it would be that no matter what, you can find the positive in a horrible situation. Even though losing my Dad was the hardest thing to ever happen to me and I miss him every day, knowing how his loss inspired these incredible memories and opportunities makes the situation just a little better."
—*Emma Justus*

"Making Headway has helped me connect to all these amazing families to help spread the joyful moments that my dad believed in, despite what's going on in their lives. Each day I know my dad would be proud of me for the work I'm doing to improve the lives of these kids."
—*Oliver Justus*

If you want to learn more, join one of their clubs, or support any of the programs started by the Justus family, please visit any of the following websites. If you are inspired by their work, and want to start something of your own, please contact Dan Lipka at Making Headway—we would be proud to partner with you.

makingheadway.org/davidjustus
makingheadway.org/clubcare
makingheadway.org/jet

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.

> "When I decide to go ahead with surgery on a patient, it's really a commitment for life. Some of these kids are going to need several operations and various other treatments, like radiation and chemotherapy, and you're with them through the whole process. You really become a part of their lives." —*Dr. Jeffrey Wisoff*

KICKS FOR CANCER: HONORING COURTNEY'S LEGACY

This past fall, the Hauppauge Girls Varsity Soccer Team came together for its 18th Annual Kicks for Cancer event. The tradition began in 2008 in memory of Courtney Tomkin, a vibrant young athlete whose courage in the face of brain cancer continues to inspire all who knew her.

At that very first event, Courtney herself was on the field, playing with the spirit and strength of a true champion. Two months later, she lost her battle with brain cancer. In her memory, Kicks for Cancer grew from a small community fundraiser into one of Hauppauge's largest annual events. The evening is now filled with energy and joy: food trucks, games, raffles, spirited school decorations, and two varsity soccer matches played with pink jerseys and a pink soccer ball. Courtney's coach, Jessica Kulesa, and countless local athletes, students, families, and neighbors continue to be the backbone of this event, and their hard work is deeply appreciated.

Since its founding, Kicks for Cancer has raised nearly $1 million to advance pediatric cancer research and support meaningful charities. Beneficiaries have included the Making Headway Foundation (over $315,000), the American Cancer Society, Make-A-Wish Foundation, and the Courtney Tomkin Scholarship Fund, among others. Through Kicks for Cancer, the Hauppauge community ensures that Courtney's legacy lives on—fueling hope, funding research, and standing strong for children and families facing cancer.

Photo credit: Frank Bayer

Dayanara (top right) and her family enjoying the 2025 Making Headway Yacht Cruise.

“THE WEEK THAT **CHANGED MY LIFE**”

By Dayanara Gallego

Hi. My name is Dayanara Gallego and when I was 15 years old, I was diagnosed with a low-grade glioma, a type of brain tumor that is newly diagnosed in 1,600 children every year.

When an orthopedic doctor first ordered an MRI of my spine, on Saturday October 12, 2024, I was in shock. He also referred me to a neurologist because he noticed I had weakness in my right hand. I didn’t have full strength in my right leg either. Still, I thought I was just coming in for a routine MRI appointment. But when I got out of the MRI machine, the doctors escorted me to my mom and told her I had to go to Cohen’s Children’s Hospital emergency room immediately. They had seen something on the back of my head while they were conducting the MRI of my spine.

At Cohen’s emergency room, the doctors told me I would be spending the night so they could get another MRI of my brain, run some more tests, and figure out if it was a cyst or tumor.

The next day, October 13, I had the brain MRI. Later that day, they told me they still did not know whether it was a cyst or a tumor, but said that once it was confirmed, they would most likely perform emergency surgery the following day. That evening the neurosurgeon confirmed that it was a tumor right in the middle of my brain. On October 14, my emergency surgery began at 10 a.m. and lasted all day. When I finally was out of surgery, I couldn’t walk or talk, and began crying hysterically. It was very hard to communicate when I was hungry or had to use the bathroom. I had a lot of intensive therapy to get me back to my regular self. I had to learn how to do the basic everyday things. I spent my 16th birthday and Thanksgiving in the hospital. After two long months I was able to be discharged and spend Christmas at home with my family.

It’s hard to believe it’s been a year since my brain surgery, and looking back, it was one of the most difficult, life-changing experiences I’ve ever faced. This chapter of my life tested me in ways I never imagined, but it also showed me how strong I am. I’m so thankful I made it through and that my recovery has been going so well. I’m especially grateful for my mom—her love, care, and support helped me through every step of relearning how to walk, talk, write, and simply live again. I wouldn’t be here without her.

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

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