

# CARING4KATY

Having suffered from disease and loss themselves, Melanie Davila and Sheree Norton were driven to make a difference in the lives of children facing life-threatening illnesses

Written by Cherri Northcutt  
Photography by Layla Zakaria

Tayden Ybarra is a sweet 5-year-old girl who loves to sing, dance, and play with dolls. She undergoes eight hours of chemotherapy every week to aggressively attack cancerous tumors in her brain. Alley Mansel is an adorable child with an infectious smile who spent six months in the hospital battling leukemia and is now in remission. Cade Hooper, a junior at Fort Bend Christian Academy, is happy to be back on the football field after a 21-month-long battle with lymphoma. These are just some of the children helped by Caring4Katy, a non-profit organization with a mission to assist families affected by life-threatening childhood illnesses.

## Pain with a Purpose

Melanie Davila, co-founder of Caring4Katy, suffered a stroke in 2008. "We basically lived in the hospital for a year and after 10 surgeries, they finally diagnosed me with moyamoya disease," she says. "I felt like I was done." Moyamoya had restricted the blood flow to her brain, and Davila headed to Stanford University for brain bypass surgery. "It would have been easier for me to go through that if I could have talked to someone else who had survived and overcome it." Now, Davila encourages others to keep believing and stay strong. That's why she and her friend Sheree Norton co-founded Caring4Katy.

Norton, who lost her daughter Savannah to spinal muscular atrophy just two months before her third birthday in 2013,

says, "Savannah was more than a blessing to us. She didn't get to have a normal childhood, but she impacted more people than anyone else ever could." It was a hard journey with time spent in and out of hospitals. "Savannah struggled to breathe, but she had an expressive smile that the disease never took away," says Norton. "When you go through that, it's an isolated, lonely place to be. You feel like nobody else understands what you're going through." Norton was committed to giving her daughter the best quality of life possible, despite her illness. "When the disease took her life, I realized that she came with a purpose and that is to help others to not live this life selfishly but to see the needs of others and to help them," she says.

## Caring for Others

Davila and Norton soon realized their mutual desire to help other families struggling with childhood illnesses through Caring4Katy. "The counselor at their school put us in touch with a few families through the school district registry. That was our starting point," says Davila.

"Tayden Ybarra's family was the first one we helped," Norton recalls. "We talked to a local ophthalmologist who donated new special needs glasses." They also helped the family with auto repairs and other unexpected expenses. Caring4Katy tries to seek out community help before just writing a check. Norton adds, "We reached out to Dylan's Automotive and



Davila attends several events at Texas Children's Hospital to encourage patients and their families

*“Our goal is to take on these families, not just for one time but to journey with them in the process of recovery, adopt them into our Caring4Katy family, and provide an emotional support system.”*

*- Melanie Davila, co-founder of Caring4Katy*



Caring4Katy committee members Melanie Davila, Trisha Craven, Sheree Norton, and John Guy

gave them the opportunity to be a blessing to this family, which they were happy to do.”

Another child, Eliana Nichols, suffered a stroke in utero and has neurological cerebral palsy and sensory processing dysfunction. Caring4Katy was able to give her a stabilizing pressure input orthosis, or SPIO, body compression suit. “It enables her to not be in pain throughout the day,” Norton says. Eliana also needs weekly therapy sessions, which are expensive. “One of our committee members, John Guy, is building her the equipment to do the physical therapy at home.”

Reaching out to the community for support is a big part of Caring4Katy’s mission. “One hundred percent of the money we receive goes to helping families,” Davila says. “We’re proud that our organization is run by volunteers.”

### Connecting with the Community

Families in need are brought to Caring4Katy through area social workers, MD Anderson, and Texas Children’s Hospital. “Our goal is to take on these families, not just for one time but to journey with them in the process of recovery, adopt them into our Caring4Katy family, and provide an emotional support system,” Davila says.

Caring4Katy hosts a number of events. Past events have included a gumbo and chili cook-off at No Label Brewery,

and a Christmas party at Westlake Fire Department. “It’s amazing to watch them interact and communicate with each other,” Norton says. “They create a bond, and don’t feel so alone. That is such a blessing.”

Their ultimate goal is to have a camp for the families they help. Davila foresees a resort-type facility with hospital-grade rooms and nurses on staff. “When you’re battling a life-threatening disease, doing normal family things can be difficult,” she says. “We want to provide that vacation environment with horseback riding and swimming so these families can just have fun.” **KM**



CHERRI NORTHCUTT is a freelance writer and mother of two teens in Katy.

## GET INVOLVED!

- Volunteer
- Host an event
- Donate services
- Raise funds
- Refer a family

Visit [caring4katy.com](http://caring4katy.com)

# Kingsland dental group

## GENTLE DENTAL CARE FOR YOUR KATY FAMILY

We use advanced dental technologies designed to make your entire family’s dental visits more pleasant and comfortable than ever.

FAMILY, PEDIATRIC & COSMETIC DENTISTRY, IMPLANTS & RESTORATIONS

BRIDGET  
TISSUE, D.D.S.

VESNA  
ARZINK, D.D.S.

VALERIA  
MUGETTI, D.D.S.

INGRID  
DUTHERBERT, D.D.S.

HEATHER  
THOMPSON, D.D.S.

SHERRY  
ADAMICK, D.D.S.

- KID & ADULT FRIENDLY STAFF
- EXCELLENT, CARING DENTISTS
- COMFORT-FOCUSED ATMOSPHERE

21681 KINGSLAND BLVD. KATY, TX 77450 [WWW.KINGSLANDDENTALGROUP.COM](http://WWW.KINGSLANDDENTALGROUP.COM)  
 EMAIL: [dentists@kingslanddentalgroup.com](mailto:dentists@kingslanddentalgroup.com) CALL: 281-646-8888

© 2015 Katy Magazine

96 • KATY MAGAZINE DEC/JAN 2016 Visit [KatyMagazine.com](http://KatyMagazine.com) for Katy jobs, events, news and more.



GENESIS SONATA ELANTRA ACCENT EQUUS SANTA FE VELOSTER TUCSON

Hyundai Seize The Moment Sales Event



2015 Hyundai Genesis Sedan North American Car of the Year Finalist



HUB Hyundai West

17007 Katy Freeway  
Houston, TX 77094  
832.739.6300

www.hubhyundaiokaty.com

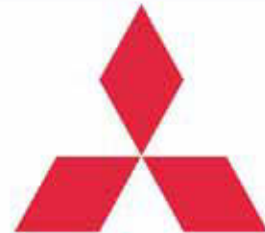
America's Best Warranty<sup>®</sup>  
10-Year/100,000-Mile  
Powertrain Limited Warranty

HYUNDAI  
Assurance

© 2015 Katy Magazine

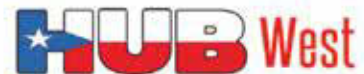


OUTLANDER SPORT



MITSUBISHI  
MOTORS

OUTLANDER LANCER MIRAGE



HUB Mitsubishi - Katy

17007 Katy Freeway  
Houston, TX 77094  
832.739.6300

www.hubmitsubishiokaty.com

GET EMPLOYEE DISCOUNTS!

Mention this ad to receive  
employee pricing.



© 2015 Katy Magazine