

# Contributor



Julie Shepherd, 17, saved six lives through organ donation at Benefis.

## Organ Donation Created Ripple Effects of Goodness

The transplant surgeon called Julie Shepherd’s heart the “mythical perfect heart.”

It’s a sentiment shared by those who knew her. The Helena 17-year-old had a megawatt smile, a deep concern for others, and a rare sparkle.

Julie’s life was too short, but her life mattered. She left a beautiful legacy of kindness. The donation of her organs saved six lives. **Her death by suicide in 2017 inspired others to start conversations about their own struggles with mental illness.**

Julie fought depression with bravery, but the darkness became more severe and more isolating until she felt there was no relief in sight.

Julie would sit in a room with her devoted family, surrounded by powerlifting and softball trophies and pictures of friends, and yet think she was unloved, friendless, and a burden, her dad Derrek Shepherd expressed.

*Continued on page 2*

“It’s about being able to know something tragic happened, but there was good that came out of it.”

Brandi Cornwell



Continued from cover

“We were trying,” he said. “I don’t think she wanted to admit what was going on.”

Derrek likened her illness to trying to convince her the wall she was looking at was painted red. She would eventually say she agreed it was red, but she would keep falsely believing it was blue.

“People are realizing it’s not about picking yourself up by your bootstraps,” he said.

**During their tragedy, Julie’s family found comfort in knowing the impact she made.** The family of a nonverbal child with autism told them about going into the bakery where Julie worked, just to see her smile. Her friends remembered her as someone who defended them. Her teachers remembered the way she lit up the hallways.

When Julie passed away, LifeCenter Northwest, Benefis’ partner in organ donation, coordinated transplant surgeons, patients, and hospitals to receive the organs. Benefis also provided a bereavement team to meet with her family.

Brandi Cornwell, RN, leads the donation team at Benefis and estimated 20 providers helped make the donation possible.

The transplant team works with the goal of “uniting to provide the gift of life to another and closure to the family that is grieving,” and of respecting the wishes of the family and donor so that life may continue.

“It’s about being able to know something tragic happened, but there was good that came out of it,” Brandi explained.

Julie’s family met the teenage girl from Utah who has Julie’s heart. As her heart failed, the girl was hooked to machines and too weak to leave her bed. **Within weeks of the transplant, she was active again, Derrek said.** And, Julie seems to have passed on her sweet tooth to the girl—she now craves ice cream, which she never favored before.

A Washington man in his early twenties was losing the ability to breathe as water filled his lungs. He sent his gratitude for Julie’s lung donation. Her liver saved a woman who was too emotional to write to Julie’s family, though her children sent their heartfelt thanks.

Julie’s family also donated her corneas, ligaments, and skin tissue.

“You start thinking of the recipients, their families, their friends, the chains of people they’ll impact down the road. Think of all the people her donation touched,” Derrek said.

Julie’s family came to Benefis this fall to put the finishing touches on a special portrait of her. **The portrait, a “floragraph” made of natural materials, will honor her life-saving legacy on the Donate Life Float in the Rose Parade on New Year’s Day in Pasadena, California.**

Her family likes to remember Julie’s surprise aptitude for powerlifting. Her skill motivated her little brother, now a volunteer firefighter, to start weight training.

“There’s more strength in you than you expect,” Derrek said. “People learned that by watching her.”

An outdoor physical therapy space at the planned Benefis Women’s and Children’s Center aims to make recovery feel like play for children.



“People are realizing it’s not about picking yourself up by your bootstraps.”

Derrek Shepherd

# Putting Pediatric Mental Health at the Forefront



Our community must take pediatric and adolescent mental health seriously. **No less than our future is at stake.**

Benefis Women's and Children's Center will provide a place for well-care checkups, specialty care, and collaboration among medical providers in a comforting, state-of-the-art facility.

Nearly a quarter of Montana students give serious thought to attempting suicide, according to the state's annual youth risk behavior survey—twenty-five percent of our children are under suffocating duress.

**With the support of donors like you, Benefis Health System is building a new Women's and Children's Center on 10th Avenue South.** The new center will host offices for pediatric psychiatry, pediatric neuropsychology, and many other pediatric health and wellness services.

"With the advent of the Women's and Children's Center, we're speaking about creating a medical home and bringing in the neuropsychologists, child psychiatrists, and the pediatrician that's generating the referral," Dr. LaToya Floyd, a child and adolescent psychiatrist, said. "We're bringing them together in a collaborative way because together, we're stronger."

“ Together, we're stronger. ”

Dr. LaToya Floyd

**Benefis specialists need your help as they work together to help children and their families grow toward fulfilling, productive lives.** "If we can figure out how to create a continuum of care of the services that we have, we will definitely see change in our community," Dr. Floyd said.

Dr. Emily Grant, a pediatrician and a mom, said investing in the new center will pay itself forward as it improves the health of the next generation of Montanans.

"We serve a large area, and if you put all the children in those communities together, that is our future," she said. "Getting them a solid foundation started as children makes a lifelong impact."

**We believe we can all make an impact in improving young people's health.**

Your gifts toward building the new Women's and Children's Center with its multidisciplinary health and wellness programs will help build brighter futures for Montana's youth.





# Scholarships Help Tomorrow's Nurses Focus on Their Studies

The desire to help her community along with her caring nature fostered in Megan Rovere Brunelle of Cascade the dream of becoming a registered nurse.

For six years, Megan has been a certified nursing assistant (CNA) with Benefis Health System focusing on senior services and oncology. She has a heart for oncology, but she would eventually like to work in women's and children's health for low income patients.

Megan, a nursing student at Montana State University's Great Falls Campus, is one of 39 students from the area to receive a healthcare scholarship from Benefis Foundation. **In total, the Foundation awarded \$91,300 in scholarships for the fall 2019 and spring 2020 semesters.**

"Knowing that I won't have to take out any more student loans for this school year because of this scholarship provides a huge relief financially for my family and me," Megan said.

Benefis Foundation provided an additional \$2,000 to four MSU College of Nursing, Great Falls Campus Upper Division summer interns, made possible by the Cecil and Dorothy Goodbrand Nursing Scholarship.

The Benefis Foundation Healthcare Scholarship Program is designed to help college students pursue a degree, certification, or advancement in a medically related field. **Thanks to the generosity of many donors, Benefis Foundation has awarded more than 660 students with \$1.28 million in scholarships over the past 21 years.**

“ This award makes it possible for those who have a passion for healthcare but struggle financially to be able to become great nurses and to touch the patients we serve. ”

Megan Rovere Brunelle

**Please consider supporting the Healthcare Scholarship Program with your next gift to Benefis Foundation.**

Your contribution will help students like Megan earn their degree and will help our community gain skilled and compassionate healthcare professionals.



Megan Rovere Brunelle is pursuing her nursing studies with help from Benefis Foundation donors.

# A New Vein Finder Eases Cancer Patients' Treatment

A gentleman who suffered through 23 needle pokes just days before his visit to Benefis Sletten Cancer Institute was distraught at the idea of yet more needles.

Fortunately his nurses had a new tool, and he was the first patient to benefit from the AccuVein Vein Finder at the Institute.

The AccuVein projected a neon-green map of veins directly onto the man's skin, making a needlestick easy despite his hard-to-find veins and dehydration. **The patient was so happy he could hardly believe it.**

When they talk about the handheld vein finder, Stephanie Fehres and Suzanne Pelensky both say "oooooh." They are registered nurses in the Infusion Suite, where chemotherapy is administered.

**A nurse might have needed 30 to 45 minutes to get a needle in someone with challenging veins.** No more.

"We are finding out just how much we need it," Stephanie said. "I don't have to poke and hope anymore. I can poke and get it. The patients are amazed."

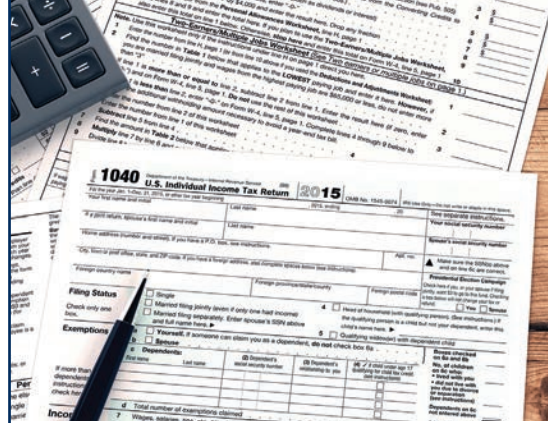
For many patients, the needlestick is high on the list of fears when they come to receive treatment. The AccuVein takes away much of that stress for patients—and for nurses, too, Suzanne said.

On her last day of chemotherapy, Barb Byrne celebrated with a cake that read, "I'm done!" She asked if she could do anything to make work easier for the caring nurses at Benefis. They brought up the struggle of finding veins on some patients, so **Barb decided to work with Benefis Foundation to donate an AccuVein.**

"They are amazing," Barb said of the nurses. "They put in a lot of IVs, and I don't know how they manage to poke people who are so sick. For five months, I had chemo there, and I would see how sick patients were. I wanted to make it better for all the patients I'd seen, and those yet to come."



An AccuVein Vein Finder projects a map of a woman's veins for easy needle insertion at Sletten Cancer Institute.



## Use Your IRA to Make Tax-Wise Gifts!

"Using a portion of my 'required minimum distribution' from my IRA to make gifts to Benefis Foundation is so easy, and saves on my taxes, too!"  
**Darlene Pugh, Fort Benton, MT**

Those who are 70 ½ or older may make gifts from traditional IRA accounts without it counting as taxable income. Amounts given in this way count toward required IRA minimum withdrawal amounts for the year of the gift and can support the program or service of the donor's choosing.

### Benefits

- Gifts from IRAs reduce your taxable income
- Gifts count toward your required minimum distribution
- Gifts reduce an asset that can be highly taxed when given to heirs

### How to give

- Must be 70 ½ or older
- Give to a qualified public charity, like Benefis Health System Foundation
- Ask your administrator to make a gift directly to the charity

**For more information about making tax-wise gifts, please call Marilyn Parker at (406) 455-5836.**

Patients at Benefis Sletten Cancer Institute have a much more comfortable experience thanks to the many donors who have stepped forward since the Institute was founded in 2005.

**To be a hero for local cancer patients, just return the enclosed giving envelope or donate online.**



Marking milestones in the NICU is an important part of helping families cope with a challenging situation.

## Marking Babies' Milestones in the NICU

As she watched her twin grandbabies fight for their lives in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), Patti Ashmore was in a familiar place. Thirty-five years earlier, her son was a Benefis NICU baby, too.

"Just watching your child struggle, then your grandchildren, you just never know what's going to happen," she said. "We had moments we didn't know if they were going to live or not."

On the fourth anniversary of her granddaughter, Isabella, leaving the NICU after 160 days, Patti said her experiences inspired her to help bring a sense of normalcy—and even happiness—to other families with babies in the hospital.

**In ways small and large, donors and volunteers make a difference every day for families in the Benefis NICU.**

"If I could do something for the NICU, I wanted to. It's just a special place," Patti said. "Really the joy it brings to their families is what it's all about. It's about bringing normalcy to a situation that's scary and not at all normal."

Patti makes Halloween costumes for NICU babies. Her favorite costume was a ladybug, but Patti also made felt costumes for a hungry caterpillar, superheroes, candy treats, and a ballerina. **The costumes lie on the delicate babies, and their families can take them home as a memento.** The babies in their costumes are darling, and Patti said they help parents celebrate a milestone.



Photography by David Rabenberg Photography

“If I could do something for the NICU, I wanted to. It's just a special place.”

Patti Ashmore



"A baby's first Halloween or Christmas is a big deal. It needs to be celebrated even if your baby is not home yet," she said.

Patti's husband, Wiley Kendle, does his part for NICU families, too. He dresses up as Santa Claus and holds the tiny babies celebrating their first Christmas.

**One of the most precious gifts to Benefis Health System is our volunteers' time and labor.**

Our volunteers rock babies, knit hats, visit with families in the Emergency Department, answer phones, file paperwork, help customers in the gift shops, greet patients, enrich the lives of senior care residents, and help patients and families through Benefis Peace Hospice of Montana. If you'd like more information, visit [benefis.org/volunteer](http://benefis.org/volunteer).

# Benefis Employees Set Fundraising Record

Benefis Health System employees once again proved they believe in the mission of Benefis Foundation through their generosity during the annual We Care! We Share! Employee Giving Campaign.

With their gifts to the Foundation, to United Way, and to other local nonprofits, **59 percent of employees donated and set a new giving record of \$545,731\***, more than \$21,000 above last year's tally. Forty-one departments saw 100 percent participation.

Employees can choose among causes such as the Angel Fund, which helps the families of children who must travel for further treatment, the Caring for Our Own Fund, which supports employees in crisis, or they can direct their contributions to whatever has the greatest need.

Some employees stretched their dollars with a unique program aimed at helping young professionals throughout our community become dedicated philanthropists. Thanks to a generous donation, any gifts to build the new **Benefis Women's and Children's Center** from donors ages 21-40 will be matched, up to \$100,000. Young professionals who donate \$500 by the end of 2020—that's less than \$10 a week next year—will be recognized on a donor wall to inspire the next generation of philanthropists. Between We Care! We Share! and the annual Mayfaire fundraiser, **the match program has raised \$42,720 so far.**

Cathy Burnstein, BMG Clinic Manager, joined the We Care! We Share! Campaign Committee four years ago because she's inspired by seeing everyone come together for a common goal.

"Through helping others and becoming more involved in our community, we are able to look past our differences and work toward a better world for everyone," she said.



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Cathy Burnstein

## 2019 We Care! We Share! top three supported funds

Women's and Children's Center

Caring for Our Own

Angel Fund

\*Includes \$59,218 worth of 2019 Mayfaire pledges

Benefis employees who give to the We Care! We Share! campaign understand that no matter the size of their gift, every contribution makes a difference.

**Help ensure people continue to get the assistance they need. Visit [Benefis.org/Foundation](https://www.benefis.org/foundation) to donate to your favorite fund today.**

# Remodeled Kitchen Proves More Inviting for Hospice Families and Volunteers

Cooking his specialty—a spaghetti dinner—was one patient’s way to say “I love you” to his family. With a little help in the kitchen, he cooked that meal to show his gratitude for the staff and his care for the other patients of Benefis Peace Hospice of Montana.

That dinner was one of the recent special memories made in the hospice house’s kitchen, a hub in the residential facility for terminally ill patients.

The kitchen is where volunteers hustle to get hot meals onto plates for patients. It’s where families gather to laugh, to cry, to take a breath, to make plans, and even to prepare a loved one’s favorite dishes. It’s where volunteers make special holiday dinners. **It’s a touch of home, beauty, and comfort.**

“When patients are ill, the smells and the environment of the kitchen make a huge difference,” said Vicki Robinson, Peace Hospice Director. “If patients are able to come in, it’s like home with friendly volunteers to interact with.”

## Thanks to generous donors, Benefis Peace Hospice of Montana has a newly remodeled kitchen.

The remodel included installing new commercial-grade kitchen appliances, a new pantry, an updated food prep area, better lighting, an expanded countertop for plating patients’ meals, new seating, and a self-serve area—the “Angel Bar”—for coffee and snacks.



Donors to the Benefis Foundation made possible the renovation of the kitchen at Benefis Peace Hospice. Besides the kitchen’s practical use, it’s also a source of comfort for patients and their families.

**The next project planned for Peace Hospice is a “sending room.”** That’s where loved ones say goodbye as a patient’s body is received by the funeral home. A small sign over the door to the outside reads, “Sending you with eternal peace and love.”

The room will be a repurposing of an atrium at the end of a hallway. The driveway already is in place and is designed so other patients and their families won’t see the hearse. The staff wants to add doors to make the space more private for the grieving.

“Our staff is really good at paying attention to those kinds of things,” Hospice Nurse Donna Franko said. “This is better. It offers more privacy for the families and easier for other patients.”

“When patients are ill, the smells and the environment of the kitchen make a huge difference.”

Vicki Robinson

Robinson said one of the immediate results of the remodel is more people gathering in the homey kitchen/dining area. “It’s comforting for people,” she said.

The addition of plate warmers helps volunteers serve meals hot for patients who may be slow to eat, volunteer Jim Capp said.

The newly done kitchen doesn’t get so hot in the summer, and the dishes zip through the washing process now, Capp said. Volunteers no longer are stumbling over each other thanks to a better organized space.

## Your gifts can make a family’s hospice journey easier.

Please consider enclosing a gift in the attached giving envelop or giving online at [Benefis.org/Foundation](http://Benefis.org/Foundation).