



The Sunflower Fund

Partnered by DKMS

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

PRETORIA SCHOOL GIRL'S FIGHT FOR A STEM CELL DONOR STRENGTHENED

[18 JANUARY 2021] The Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS has joined forces with the family of 12-year-old Pretoria school-girl, Justine van Vollenstee, to find her a blood stem cell donor as she fights for her life following a life threatening blood disorder diagnosis for severe aplastic anaemia. Justine received the devastating news in November 2020 and joins countless patients who require a matching donor to give them hope at a second chance at life.

Every 27 seconds, someone somewhere in the world is diagnosed with blood cancer.

Aplastic anaemia is a disease in which the body fails to produce enough blood cells in sufficient numbers. For many patients, a stem cell transplant is their only hope of cure.

Since Justine does not have any siblings, this makes it a challenge for her to find a matching donor from an unrelated person. Her only hope at a second chance at life is a blood stem cell transplant from a matching donor.

Recounting the experience leading to the diagnosis, Justine's mother, Geraldine van Vollenstee, recalls that her daughter began experiencing blackouts and developed spots all over her skin. Her blood levels also reached an all-time low. "Prior to that, Justine was very active, she enjoyed dancing and swimming. She also has aspirations to become a lawyer." "Today", said Geraldine, "she is tired after taking one step".

Without a much needed stem cell match, Geraldine fears the disease could be deadly.

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“The Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS’s mandate is to support patients through what is often the biggest fight of their lives. There is a 1:100 000 chance of a patient finding their match, which is why growing the registry is so important. Our partnership with DKMS will provide us with wider reach and enable us enhance our capacity in South Africa and in the wider continent”, said Alana James, CEO of the Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS.

James continues that while COVID-19 has interrupted some of the outreach operations, the public’s support for swab kits has grown in strength, “in 2020 alone, more than 5 000 people responded to our donor appeal to recruit more stem cell donors, giving us the opportunity to grow our registry and help the many patients that are awaiting donors. We couldn’t do what we do without the generosity of the public,” she concludes.

In support of their daughter, Justine’s family encourage anyone who is between the ages of 18-55 and in good health, to register with The Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS (www.sunflowerfund.org) as a potential stem cell donor today. Please visit our website for donor information, exclusion criteria, and to register.

The Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS aims to educate and raise awareness about the need for stem cell donors, as well as the importance of recruiting to build and maintain a registry of committed donors.

If you are aged 18-55 and are in general good health, you can register as a stem cell donor to help Justine and many patients like her.

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About The Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS

The Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS is a donor recruitment centre and stem cell registry for Africa and is part of a global network, dedicated to creating awareness about blood diseases and stem cell donation, recruiting blood stem cell donors and maintaining a registry of committed donors.

The Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS pays for the cost of the tissue-type testing. This is fundamental to saving the lives of South Africans and patients globally who need a stem cell transplant. The chance of finding a matching donor is 1 in 100,000 – and as ethnic origin plays



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a significant role in the search for a donor, South Africa's rainbow nation is at a distinct disadvantage, requiring a large pool of prospective donors.

About DKMS

DKMS is an international non-profit organisation dedicated to the fight against blood cancer. Founded in 1991 in Germany by Dr. Peter Harf, DKMS has expanded internationally in recent years by establishing entities in the US, Poland, the UK, Chile, together with BMST in India and in South Africa together with The Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS. Together, they have registered more than 9.9 million potential blood stem cell donors and have given more than 84,000 patients across the globe a second chance at life by facilitating blood stem cell transplants.

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