

## **Tanner Fitzpatrick's Story** From David Foster Foundation

On March 28, 2017 Tanner will return to Calgary with his family to join in honouring Marit McKenzie's legacy by joining the students of Calgary Christian School in the fifth annual Marit Cup.

Tanner Fitzpatrick was born and raised in a small town in Newfoundland & Labrador. Like many Canadian boys, he grew up with early mornings, playing hockey at the local rink, along with his younger brother.

In May 2012, when Tanner was 13 years old he became sick and was taken to the local hospital, which referred him to Janeway Children's Hospital in St John's, where he was diagnosed with Cardiomyopathy. He was hospitalized and started on meds to stabilize his condition.

When the medical team saw minimal improvement, Tanner and his parents, Trudy and Phil, were sent to Toronto SickKids Hospital for a transplant assessment in September 2012. During the transplant assessment, the medical team determined he was not medically ready to be put on the heart transplant list. Tanner and his family returned home to Newfoundland where Tanner's quality of life continued to deteriorate over the next couple of months leaving him in a wheelchair with barely enough energy.

By December 2012, Tanner's health took a further decline, and shortly after Christmas the family returned to Toronto for a second transplant assessment. Within a few weeks, and multiple tests Tanner was officially listed for a heart transplant on Jan. 22, 2013. There was no telling how long the wait for a donor heart was going to be. The medical team began to prepare Tanner for a left ventricular assist device (LVAD) which is a mechanical pump used for patients who have reached end-stage heart failure, which helps pump blood to the rest of the body. The hard process of waiting began and for the family all the unknown questions began to surface. How long they would have to wait for a donor heart, and would Tanner remain strong enough to handle the surgery all while knowing what would have to occur for Tanner to receive a heart.

To everyone's surprise, a donor heart became available after six days on the waitlist. On Jan. 29, 2013 Tanner received the gift of life from an anonymous donor. Tanner's transplant was successful and he was discharged to Ronald McDonald House, but was required to remain in Toronto for post transplant recovery and medical follow up appointments. Although Tanner experienced some complications which required him to be readmitted to the hospital for closer monitoring, Tanner returned home to Newfoundland in April of 2013 with a new lease on life.

In Feb. 2015, Tanner and his family received a letter from the donor family. It did not take him long to realize he was the recipient of Marit McKenzie's gift. Tanner began to follow her story and watched from a distance as Marit's legacy and spirit left behind, continued to inspire others.

In early 2016, Tanner approached his parents and asked if it was possible for him to meet Marit's family and if there was a way he could participate in Marit Cup. The Fitzpatrick family knew the McKenzie family had ties with the David Foster Foundation. In November of 2016, Tanner, and his parents boarded a plane in Newfoundland for a flight across the country to meet the McKenzie family. In a private and emotional meeting Tanner gifted the McKenzie family the opportunity to hear the heart inside his chest that connected the two families.