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FANTASTIC KIDS

Bear Hugs for Kids with Cancer

BY KRISTEN KREISHER



Taylor Crabtree owns and operates a successful business with a well-designed e-commerce website, manages hundreds of enthusiastic workers, and

finds time to give back, in a big way, to kids in need.

Taylor's résumé is admirable by adult standards. By 10-year-old standards, it's extraordinary.

Taylor is the founder of TayBear Company, a nonprofit corporation that has put thousands of custom-made teddy bears into the arms of kids with cancer. She was inspired to help, she says, because both of her grandmothers suffered from cancer, and one died of the disease. She feels it is an even scarier condition for the approximately 12,000 children each year who are diagnosed with cancer or chronic blood disease.

These are "just kids," Taylor stresses. "They like music and toys and cartoons and stuff, but then they also have to fight something that can kill them." Taylor hopes the bears she ships to pediatric oncology wards across the country help when these children are "sad and lonely and feel a lot of pain."

Taylor buys the bears with donations and the money she raises by selling hand-painted hair clips outside of local businesses, at speaking engagements, and on her website. When the demand became greater than what Taylor herself could produce, she invited friends and neighbors to a "painting party" at her family's home. In the three-plus years TayBear has been in operation, more than 500 kids have helped paint and mail hair clips and package bears for hospitals. Taylor thinks the best thing about her effort is when the children who receive the bears discover "a bunch of kids that they will never meet worked really hard to give them a bear hug."

The help of volunteers, however, isn't the only thing that keeps TayBear going. Taylor had to hone her elementary-level math skills to keep up with the finances of her growing company. She now keeps her own records on computer, writes checks, and balances her own account. The fifth-grader also learned to type so she could keep up with the e-mails that flood her inbox.

TayBear has also benefited from some generous grown-ups. Along with support from her parents and advice from adult friends, the manager at the Union Bank of California sponsored Taylor's business

account and bought enough hair clips to cover the cost of her \$12 business license. Website hosting was donated by Timevision, and Cybercash donated the technology that allows her website to accept credit cards.

Cybercash employees were the first to give the new technology a test by making an online donation. Build-a-Bear Workshop, who helped Taylor find a supplier for her bears and created her company's logo, outfits each bear with a custom made T-shirt. Numerous other businesses have contributed paints, signs, laminating services, and other supplies, enabling Taylor to put 97% of her profits toward the purchase of more bears.

In spite of all of her accomplishments, Taylor is a pretty normal fifth grader. She describes the company as "just something that I do." She also enjoys soccer, swimming, and volleyball, and spending time with her friends, dog, and family.

Her advice to other kids:

"Have an idea—even if it's in a weird direction—and just never give up. There are lots of things kids can do to help."

For more information about TayBear, or to make a donation, go to www.taybearhugs.org or write to TayBear, 993 South Sante Fe Avenue, #C339, Vista CA 92083. ✿