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## FAMILY MATTERS

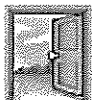
# A Grieving Family Starts a Charity

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Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL  
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If you go to [curingkidscancer.org](http://curingkidscancer.org)<sup>1</sup>, you will find a picture of a smiling little boy with big brown eyes. He is Killian Owen and he died of leukemia on July 27, 2003, when he was 9½ years old. Like so many families who have lost loved ones, Killian's parents and three brothers -- including his twin -- are now pouring themselves into a charity they've set up. In their case, it is a program called Coaches Curing Kids Cancer that raises money for pediatric cancer research.

It has become increasingly common for families with means who have experienced a loss to start a charitable effort. This has led to some very effective campaigns, such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). But starting such a venture when coping with anger, grief and exhaustion presents a unique set of challenges.

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Killian was diagnosed with leukemia in December 1999, after suffering a high fever and a stomachache. He underwent chemotherapy, then a bone-marrow transplant, then doses of an experimental drug that no child had ever taken. After he died, his mother, Grainne, says she spent a year being angry.

Those feeling of outrage and powerlessness kept the Owens from even keeping up with the charity work they'd been doing, let alone starting something new. When Killian was sick, his father, Clay, a telecommunications executive, joined the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society of Georgia and became a trustee. He was very active in the organization's fund-raising efforts, hoping of course that it might lead to something that would save his son. But after he lost Killian, he says, "I really questioned if I could get back into that."

As the first anniversary of Killian's death approached, Grainne collected her thoughts. "I felt like I'd been angry long enough and I needed to channel my energies into something positive," she says. They knew many families who had set up their own foundations, so the Owens looked into creating one themselves. But that required an enormous amount of paperwork, legal work and expense.

Grainne had been taken by an idea, inspired by Killian, when he participated in a campaign for the hospital where he was treated, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta. A coach of a local kids sports team heard him on a radiothon fundraiser saying he didn't mind getting spinal taps because he could go to the treasure box for a present afterward. The coach decided to donate to the hospital the money his team always pooled at the end of the season to buy him a gift.

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Grainne went to the hospital and said she wanted to expand the idea into an active program that would encourage teams to take the money they would otherwise spend on a coach's gift and donate it to pediatric cancer research in the coach's name. She promised to pour all her energy into promoting it. In return, she asked the hospital to agree to use the funds for research. The first donation, about \$100, came in on Sept. 9. After publicity in local newspapers, a baseball league raised \$4,000. By December, donations reached \$60,000.

Now the Owens have gone the next step to making the program truly national -- something many of the small foundations inspired by a loved ones illness never do, says Patrick Rooney, director of research at Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University. They have joined forces with the National Childhood Cancer Foundation and its fund-raising arm, CureSearch, which channels both government and private money to research at childhood-cancer centers around the country. The group's resources have enabled the program to tap into a national network. With more than 160 million children participating in team sports in the U.S., the program has huge potential. Grainne argues that coaches love it because it isn't a gift that gathers dust in a drawer and team mothers love it because they don't have to worry about what to buy.

But success will not come easily. Grainne easily puts in 80 hours a week, her husband estimates, on the effort. "Although Killian's story did not have the ending we wanted it to have, the fact is that we can make his experience into something inspirational and hopeful."

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