

*"Every day, living with sickle cell is a risk, but you learn how to live with it, you have to."* Jhana Blackwood



When he was only a few weeks old, Cory Blackwood was diagnosed with sickle cell anemia. His treatment included medications for pain and also for prevention of infections, lung damage, and strokes. However, now 16 years old and after what many consider a miracle, Cory has been cured after receiving a bone marrow transplant, donated by his younger sister, Mia.

In 2003, Cory's parents, Jhana and Sherlock, moved their family from New York to Florida. And, while finding the best doctors and hospitals were a priority, the family was overjoyed to also learn about Camp Boggy Creek. During a Family Retreat program, Jhana attended one of the parent breakout sessions and quickly learned the benefits of sharing with other families who understood the challenges and obstacles that Cory and her family endured daily. "We have many caring friends and family who want to help, but sometimes it is very difficult to explain exactly what you need. You are literally in survival mode all the time, but at Boggy Creek, you are surrounded by families who understand completely," Jhana shared.



Sickle Cell is a blood disorder that affects the protein (hemoglobin) found in red blood cells that help carry oxygen throughout the body. When cells are exposed to low oxygen levels, they form a crescent shape, or sickle. The cells can become stuck more easily in small blood vessels and break into pieces that interrupt healthy blood flow causing disabling pain crises. Cory and his family, like so many families, learned to live with the pain and manage the effects of sickle cell disease.



Before Cory turned 15 years old, he was regularly admitted into the hospital about every 6 weeks for pain relief treatment. But, there was hope. After learning about a new treatment, Cory's parents researched the possibility of having a bone marrow transplant. Cory's sister, Mia, was a perfect match and after a consultation with specialists, Cory was admitted for surgery in September 2010. He spent seven weeks in the hospital and another 10 weeks in recovery. Today, he is cured.

Cory will turn 17 next spring and hopes to return to summer camp at Boggy Creek for the Leaders in Training / Camper in Transition (LIT/cit) program. He and his family continue to share their experiences to educate more families about the bone marrow transplant option. As a counselor, there is no doubt he would be an amazing role model for younger campers with sickle cell disease.