

# Impact

**2019 Ambassador Brooke Vittimberga** was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia (AML) four years ago. With her cancer in remission, Brooke continues to battle serious side effects from treatment. This future doctor is passionate about improving the lives of young adults with cancer.



## Hero for Other Kids

Brooke made her career decision as a child—long before cancer almost derailed her dream. In high school, she spent two summers doing medical research. “I know, I was a nerd,” the Stanford University senior laughs.

Cancer treatments and side effects forced Brooke to take two leaves of absence from college. While treatments brought her leukemia into remission, they left her with severe chronic graft vs. host disease (GVHD), which causes traumatic and life-threatening side effects. Brooke has dealt with permanent hair loss, digestive issues, infertility, kidney failure and

scleroderma, a thickening of the skin that can restrict motion, eating and even breathing.

Persistence has marked her journey. During treatment, Brooke still conducted cancer research at New York’s Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center—while she was a patient there—and the Stanford Cancer Center, a St. Baldrick’s-funded lab. Now, she has been accepted to medical school via Mount Sinai’s FlexMed program.

Brooke’s St. Baldrick’s Hero Fund has raised more than \$13,000 to advance research into GVHD and improve survivorship for young adults. “The childhood cancer community is amazing—families with fierce dedication and community members who go above and beyond to help out,” says the 2019 St. Baldrick’s Foundation ambassador. Her advice to potential donors: “If you’re thinking about helping, do it! You can be a little involved, or a lot involved. It all adds up and is so appreciated.”

## Bullseye!

### Groundbreaking therapy gains FDA approval

It’s not often that a pediatric oncologist gets really excited. But Douglas S. Hawkins, M.D., couldn’t wait to share the news with the parents of his young patient: “I think we’ve got a way to treat your son.”

Dr. Hawkins was referring to a 2016 clinical trial underway at Seattle Children’s Hospital, where he is Hematology/Oncology Division chief and associate director of the Center for Clinical and Translational Research. The trial studied the effectiveness of a new medication, larotrectinib, in treating solid masses with a very specific genetic alteration that triggers tumor growth.

Born with a tumor below his knee, Dr. Hawkins’ 5-year-old patient was a perfect candidate. The mass had invaded most of the kindergartner’s lower leg, but after four months on larotrectinib, it was gone. Remarkably, the drug had caused virtually no side effects. Other researchers reported similar findings. “I distinctly remember a call with investigators from around the country. Almost every patient was responding,” Dr. Hawkins recalls. “It was one of those chilling moments, when you knew we had something good.”

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## Bullseye! (continued)

The results were so good, in fact, that the clinical trial led to accelerated approval of larotrectinib by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) last fall. It's a seismic shift in the way researchers are approaching the treatment of cancers. This emerging type of precision medicine hits the bullseye in genetically stopping tumors by targeting the alteration that makes them grow. It's also the first cancer drug developed, almost in tandem, for both adults and children.

**"St. Baldrick's allows us to have the infrastructure to do these studies. We're so grateful to the donors who support St. Baldrick's, which in turn supports the COG."**

The St. Baldrick's Foundation provided important support in the development of larotrectinib, according to Dr. Hawkins, who is also chair of the Soft Tissue Sarcoma Committee at the Children's Oncology Group (COG). The COG unites more than 9,000 childhood cancer experts through clinical trials around the world, including at Seattle

Children's Hospital. St. Baldrick's has supported every trial funded through the COG, and has enabled Dr. Hawkins' lab to assemble the talented team that studied larotrectinib in Seattle.

"We had the team already in place, which was key to getting our part of this study up and running quickly," notes Dr. Hawkins, whose hospital treated eight kids with larotrectinib. "St. Baldrick's allows us to have the infrastructure to do these studies. We're so grateful to the donors who support St. Baldrick's, which in turn supports the COG."

The COG's next step is determining if larotrectinib can be used as a first-line treatment for kids with tumors, before standard protocols like chemotherapy. While the revolutionary drug treats just 1% of solid tumors, he hopes it's the tip of the iceberg leading to similar breakthroughs for other cancers. He's cautiously optimistic: "This is a remarkable story, but we have to keep in mind that it's a rarity. Right now, the impact is narrow. But it does make you wonder: are there other targets out there?"



Zach, age 17  
Acute lymphoblastic leukemia  
Survivor  
St. Baldrick's 2018 Ambassador

## Join one of our **One Hour: One Child**

events to learn how you can invest in clinical trial funding to help kids battling cancer and be part of their healthy futures. We encourage you to bring your like-minded friends to learn more about St. Baldrick's and how individual, directed support can speed up discoveries.

Coming soon to these areas:

- Delray Beach, FL
- Las Vegas, NV

**Watch for additional details at**  
[StBaldricks.org/onehour-onechild](http://StBaldricks.org/onehour-onechild)

# It Takes A Village

**Lots of behind the scenes support is needed for a breakthrough like larotrectinib to gain FDA approval. These researchers—three of the 18 who authored the clinical trial—credit St. Baldrick's for planting the seeds that led to their groundbreaking work.**



## **Dr. Noah Federman** **UCLA**

As a St. Baldrick's Scholar from 2009-2014, Noah Federman, M.D., started building the Pediatric Bone and Soft Tissue Sarcoma Program at the UCLA Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center. That program was recently one of the sites selected for the clinical trial that led to the FDA's accelerated approval of larotrectinib. He's grateful for the protected time and support his St. Baldrick's grant provided: "St. Baldrick's believed in me

and said, 'We have confidence in this young guy who has no track record.'"

**"I never thought I would see these results—each time I see patients' tumors disappearing in front of my eyes, I am in awe."**

Fast forward five years, and Dr. Federman now has a great track record. In fact, he treated the youngest patient on the larotrectinib clinical trial. Just one month old, the infant was born with infantile fibrosarcoma, a rare cancer in children that can show up anywhere in the body. The little girl had a tumor that took up half of her scalp. With no hope left, her mother enrolled her in the clinical trial at Dr. Federman's suggestion. Just days later, the tumor started shrinking, and today, she's a happy, normal toddler who loves animals.

A graduate of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, Dr. Federman leads an experienced research team dedicated to providing access to clinical trials for children with cancer. The results of the larotrectinib study were remarkable. A year after the trial's completion, 75% of patients (ages four months to 76 years) had responded to treatment. In Dr. Federman's specialty—bone and soft tissue sarcomas—the response rate was an incredible 93% reporting rapid and durable responses, with many having complete responses. He explains, "We are seeing unprecedented responses in advanced-stage cancer patients. I never thought I would see these results—each time I see patients' tumors disappearing in front of my eyes, I am in awe."

Now, he's on a quest to find outcomes that are just as effective for other types of pediatric cancer. That only comes with funding from organizations like St. Baldrick's. "We need to figure out how to improve the outcomes," he says. "That

happens through funding, and the St. Baldrick's Foundation is critical." Looking forward to someday beating cancer, he adds, "I hope one day to be out of a job and I can retire."

## **Dr. Erin R. Rudzinski** **Seattle Children's Hospital**



When it comes to detective work, Erin R. Rudzinski, M.D., ranks up there with the world's best medical sleuths. A pathologist at Seattle Children's Hospital, where she partners with Douglas S. Hawkins, M.D., Dr. Rudzinski works behind the scenes to pinpoint genetic abnormalities and improve diagnostic

testing to provide personalized medical care to every patient. She's also a pathology reviewer for the Children's Oncology Group (COG), which is funded through the St. Baldrick's Foundation.

After treating the first kid with larotrectinib at Seattle Children's—a kindergartner with an enormous tumor below the right knee—Dr. Hawkins consulted with Dr. Rudzinski. Were there more tissue samples at the hospital with this same genetic mutation? "Erin started digging in the archives and found a whole series of cases that matched the genetic mutation," Dr. Hawkins recalls. "She collaborated with others doing genetic sequencing to identify the specific set of genetic alterations we were looking for."

**"I'm always grateful for the support St. Baldrick's provided early in my career... I can honestly say it gave me my start in the research field."**

Dr. Rudzinski understands the power of collaboration, and credits St. Baldrick's with helping her to forge connections early on that paved the way to her current career. Thanks to two grants from the foundation, she has explored how precision medicine can more accurately target soft tissue cancers like rhabdomyosarcoma, the most common soft tissue cancer in children. Her goal: to reduce—and even eliminate—the devastating side effects treatments like intense chemotherapy and radiation can have on kids years later.

Dr. Rudzinski knows that contributions from the foundation's donors were vital to the success she's had in the lab today. A graduate of the Medical College of Georgia School of Medicine, she says, "I'm always grateful for the support St. Baldrick's provided early in my career. It was invaluable in fostering connections. I can honestly say, it gave me my start in the research field."

**Dr. Douglas S. Hawkins**  
**Seattle Children's Hospital**



"I can't think of anything else quite like this." That's how Douglas S. Hawkins, M.D., describes the lifesaving results achieved by larotrectinib, approved last fall by the FDA. In the 29 years since his graduation from Harvard Medical School, Dr. Hawkins has experienced other advances in pediatric cancer research. But the

progress has never been fast enough for someone who has dedicated his life to eradicating childhood cancer. Until now.

When Loxo Oncology Inc. issued a call for hospitals to host clinical trials of its drug, larotrectinib, Seattle Children's Hospital was ready. Bolstered by funding from the St. Baldrick's Foundation, the hospital already had the

**"This is a shining example of how research succeeds when you first build up the infrastructure."**

infrastructure in place to participate in the complex study. "This is a shining example of how research succeeds when you first build up the infrastructure," Dr. Hawkins says. "At Seattle Children's, we were able to do the trial so fast because we had our team in place."

The clinical trial was remarkable in several ways. It's the first cancer treatment developed in tandem for both children and adults, saving precious time getting it to market. In addition, investigators introduced a liquid form of the drug, just for kids. That's important to physicians like Dr. Hawkins, who treats some of the youngest cancer patients. "Children as young as one month old are too young to swallow pills," he explains.

Dr. Hawkins has crossed paths with St. Baldrick's several times during his career, specifically as a co-investigator on two awards previously made by St. Baldrick's. In addition, the foundation has funded every clinical trial sponsored by the Children's Oncology Group (COG), where Dr. Hawkins serves as chair of the Soft Tissue Sarcoma Committee. The COG unites more than 9,000 cancer researchers around the world.

He's a firm believer that teamwork is the only way to effectively beat childhood cancer. That includes the efforts of large organizations like the COG, research labs, investigators and generous donors, who put their faith in physicians to continue working to find a cure. It's a long road, but Dr. Hawkins is grateful that he's got plenty of company. He says, "Working closely is what the pediatric cancer community does so well. Larotrectinib was a real team effort."





# All In

Josh and Laurie Palau are devoted to supporting the St. Baldrick's Foundation. Their simple reason: "Because we can." This dedicated couple refuse to accept the funding gap in pediatric cancer research and have made a personal financial commitment to St. Baldrick's.

For the past five years, they have rallied their tight-knit community in Bucks County, Pa., to raise money that advances important research. Through a host of events, including the annual New Hope-Solebury Community Event, the Palaus—along with businesses, schools and individuals—have contributed more than \$445,000 to St. Baldrick's.

Along the way, after three years of service they joined the League of Legendary Heroes and are proud Squires of Hope. Their involvement began when a friend told Laurie about a head shaving event to honor two local boys who had passed away from cancer. Josh recalls, "Laurie saw an opportunity for our community as a whole to really step up and make a major impact."

Laurie recognized that not everyone is comfortable shaving, so she and event co-chair Erika Goodyear got creative. Now, the annual event has expanded to include carnival games, raffles, merchandise tables and paid sponsors. Other enthusiastic people have stepped up to organize fundraisers like after school walks and a basketball tournament sponsored by schools, as well as a night out for adults hosted by a local restaurant.

"There's been an amazing ripple effect from our community event—other events have spun out of it," explains Laurie, the CEO of Simply B Organized. "I think it's really important not to be head-centric, because that might not be in somebody's wheelhouse. If your gift is donating a space, or season tickets to raffle off, that's additional money for pediatric cancer research."

Josh, vice president of media strategy and platforms for Bayer U.S. Consumer Health, has carved out his own niche when it comes to St. Baldrick's. A dedicated shavee, he enlists the support of friends and business associates each time he rocks the bald. In fact, Josh currently ranks seventh on the St. Baldrick's list of top participants. He says of the couple's dedication, "We're really all in on this because of the impact cancer has had in our community and on children."



# Cuts that Cure

## How one company is helping beat childhood cancer—one head at a time

When Gordon B. Logan started Sport Clips Haircuts in the early 1990s, he wanted to make a difference beyond styling hair. So the founder and CEO developed a business model to include helping veterans and children.

Given the nature of his business, the St. Baldrick's Foundation was a perfect match for his philanthropic goal. Sport Clips set out to raise \$1 million for childhood cancer research. The partnership kicked off at Sport Clips' 2016 national convention in San Antonio, setting a record for the most simultaneous head shavings in one day; 134 shaves participated, raising \$110,000.

Since then, Sport Clips has contributed more than \$1.1 million to St. Baldrick's and recently renewed its partnership for another three years. "We've always prided ourselves in fundraising for children, so working with St. Baldrick's was a natural fit," the founder and CEO explains. "My team consists of dedicated and giving people who sincerely enjoy lending a hand to those in need."

With more than 1,800 locations in the U.S. and Canada, Sport Clips also raises money for St. Baldrick's through bake sales, raffles and direct in-store donations. "We've created a lot of initiatives that allow local stores to get involved, bringing hope and joy to many around the country," says Logan. "It's very meaningful for us to contribute to the fight against childhood cancer and make such a positive impact."

Now, Logan hopes other companies will follow suit: "Most people like to engage with companies that are doing good things for people in their communities. Not enough funding goes to cancer research, and St. Baldrick's helps fill the gap. I'm honored to have created a culture of giving. My team feels proud of themselves and the company they work for."

**Find out how your company can make an impact by contacting Robyn Raphael, director of corporate relations, at [Corporate.Partnerships@StBaldricks.org](mailto:Corporate.Partnerships@StBaldricks.org) or (626) 792-8247, ext. 248.**



### Let's Connect



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## Thank you!

Thank you for supporting lifesaving childhood cancer research. Through your gifts, you are helping the St. Baldrick's Foundation fund the best childhood cancer research, no matter where it's being done. **With almost \$27 million in grants funded last year, we are the largest private funder of pediatric cancer research grants. YOU made progress possible!**

## Ways to Give

Kids with cancer need cures now, and it starts with you. Donate to help us fund the most promising childhood cancer research. Give once or monthly. Start today. [stbaldricks.org/impact](http://stbaldricks.org/impact)



The St. Baldrick's Foundation is a volunteer and donor powered charity committed to supporting the most promising research to find cures for childhood cancers and give survivors long and healthy lives.