

Fords youngster is new face of hydrocephalus campaign

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For 5-year-old Hailie Mussinan of Fords, living a normal life was a challenge for some time, but after a series of surgeries, she has become a cheerful young girl.

Hailie was diagnosed in 2012 with a brain tumor and hydrocephalus, which causes excess accumulation of fluid in the brain. Then 3, Hailie had been suffering from severe headaches and vomiting, according to her mother, Melody Mussinan.

"On Oct. 2 of that year, Hailie went in for an outpatient MRI since the doctor thought it was something sinus-related, but I just had a mother's instinct and I knew it was something worse," Melody said.

The tumor was classified as juvenile pilocytic astrocytoma, a rare form of childhood cancer.

Prior to Hailie's surgeries, her parents noticed the girl was quiet and reserved, Melody said. They never realized that her behavior was being affected by the pain she was enduring from the tumor.

"Hailie was always shy and would just sit on the porch while her three other sisters ran around, and we always attributed that to her personality," Melody said.

Hailie's team of surgeons included Dr. Arno Fried of Advanced Neurosurgery Associates, which provides care for a variety of neurological conditions in adults and children, and has locations around the tri-state area.

"Dr. Fried removed a golf ball-sized tumor surrounded by a softball-sized cyst in a 3-year-old's skull," Melody said. "You can imagine that the pain inside her head was horrible, but one saving grace is that Hailie did not need to undergo chemotherapy."

One of Hailie's surgeries involved the insertion of a shunt to allow spinal fluid to be safely absorbed.

"When Hailie went in for her four-hour craniotomy, I had no idea what to expect, but I received such great assurance from Dr. Fried and the physician assistant, Jen Battiato, and they gave me the comfort I needed," her mother said.

Hailie ultimately endured five surgeries



Hailie Mussinan

and has since had frequent checkups to ensure she is free of tumors.

"Her last checkup was over the summer, and the results were fantastic. The shunt is doing well, and there is no sign of tumors," Melody said.

Since the surgeries, Melody has seen a drastic change in her daughter's personality and mood.

"Hailie has transformed into a different kind of child. She just started school in September and is finally opening up. Now she can be just Hailie and not the kid with medical issues," Mussinan said.

Hailie was recently selected as one of two children to serve as the 2014 National Face of Hydrocephalus Awareness for the Pediatric Hydrocephalus Foundation. The organization helps to raise the level of awareness and education about this brain condition in the United States.

"We were thrilled when we heard that Hailie has been selected, but we are even happier that we are able to share her story with others and bring more awareness about hydrocephalus," Melody said. "We decided that by going public with her story, we can help save another child's life."