

Support from near and far for 'Franklin Five'

Allison Prang 10:18 p.m. EDT June 23, 2014



(Photo: Allison Prang / The Indianapolis Star)

Bobbi Hubbard's wrists are adorned with different colors as she sits in a waiting room at IU Health Methodist Hospital.

It's been her temporary home for about the past two weeks as she stays near her daughter who is in a coma. Franklin Community High School student Sarah McLevish was pulled over a dam in Edinburgh while swimming, and of the four of her friends who swam out to help her, two died (</story/news/crime/2014/06/12/franklin-holding-services-friday-nd-teen-died-rescue-attempt/10387501/>).

"Our ultimate goal right now is to get her to, say, give us a thumbs up or stick your tongue out or ... blink for us or open (your) eyes for us when we ask you to," Hubbard said in an interview at the hospital.

While Hubbard waits and hopes for the best, people from near and far have come together to support Sarah, her family members and the other family members of what are now being called the Franklin Five. McLevish has remained in a coma since the June 6 accident but has started to do things such as yawn and blink while in a coma, her mom said.

The Facebook page "When Sarah Smiles" boasts more than 6,000 members and has become a hub for people to post messages and to share information about fundraisers to help pay the families' medical costs and other expenses. It has drawn well-wishes from people in Australia and U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan, Hubbard said.

The Facebook page also been a place for Hubbard to share updates on her daughter's medical status.

The Franklin Five are the reason Hubbard's arms are bright with colors. On her left arm are two rubber bracelets, green and purple, one in memory of Michael Chadbourne and the other for Jason Moran, the two Franklin students who died while trying to help Sarah. Above those two bracelets is a royal blue one that reads "Franklin Strong" and has the first letter of each student's name. The other two students out of the five — Trent Crabb and Mark Nally, McLevish's boyfriend — didn't suffer any injuries.

One bracelet is missing from Hubbard's arm: a white one, in support of her daughter. Hubbard gave that bracelet away to a little girl at a motorcycle ride this past weekend, one of the many fundraisers started by community members in honor of the students involved.

"I don't think any of us expected a turnout like it was," Hubbard said of Sunday's ride, her cheeks tinged red from sunburn. It was the longest period she has left the hospital since Sarah has been there. When more than 200 bikes started up on one bridge, it shook, she said.

In addition to the motorcycle ride, there have been numerous T-shirt sales, a bumper-sticker sale, and a Wiffle-ball tournament to raise funds, and a number of businesses have made donations. One woman started a meal train, where people can sign up online to bring meals to Sarah's family while she is in the hospital.

"This is like four times bigger than my hometown," said Hubbard, who grew up in Remsen, Iowa, "and ... they're doing the same thing."

Hubbard's nails and toes are painted yellow in support of her daughter, too. It's the same color Sarah's toes have been painted since she has been in the hospital. It's also the color of hope, her mom said.

The FCHS Family Fund, where some of the money raised has been going, will "help the families with funeral costs, medical bills and other incidentals that the families may incur during this time," said Franklin Community Schools spokeswoman Robin Betts in an email. Some of the money raised through fundraisers is going to different funds for specific students, she said.

Sarah Christiansen, a resident of Franklin and 2001 graduate of Franklin High School, is one of the many who has spearheaded fundraising efforts.

She took orders for T-shirts and, as of Monday, raised more than \$5,000, according to a post she made in the Facebook group. She also has had bumper stickers printed and is selling them for \$3 each, some of them at the Imagination Station toystore in town.

"I knew the support would be there," she said, "but the amount of support kind of blew me away."

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How to donate

Those interested in making a monetary donation to the families of the Franklin Five can mail a check made out to the "FCHS Family Fund." Donations also may be mailed to Franklin Community High School at 2600 Cumberland Drive, Franklin, IN 46131, or brought to a Heartland Community or Horizon Bank, according to a news release from Franklin Community Schools.

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