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Living donor program offers hope to families waiting for transplants



One-year-old Gwen Cooper is all smiles. But one year ago, her life looked very different.

By [Alayna Chapie](#)

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At only a few months old, Gwen was diagnosed with biliary atresia, a rare liver disease that impacts infants. Her parents said it was devastating news that came after weeks of tests.

"I remember when the doctor told us, 'You know, it is either not good or very bad, right?' And I was like 'well, there has got to be something right, and she's like no,'" said Matt Cooper, Gwen's dad.

After an unsuccessful Kasai procedure, Gwen was placed on the liver transplant list.

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"We had a lot of people step up and call the hotline to start the process to donate portions of their liver," recalled Matt.

One of those people, a close family friend, turned out to be a perfect match. That friend didn't hesitate to move forward, becoming Gwen's living donor and ultimately saving her life.

"She never wavered," said Tristian Cooper, mom. "She was the very first person to call. She was the very first person to step up. I mean, she was like it was never a question in her mind."

Now, a new national database aims to help others waiting for the same miracle, connecting people who want to donate part of their liver with patients still on the transplant list.

"People who are touched by not only our story, but other stories and want to become living donors can seek out those avenues without having to know people," said Tristian.

That process begins with a simple registration through the new national database, which allows potential donors to be matched with patients waiting for a liver transplant. It's an innovation the American Liver Foundation hopes will save countless lives, especially for children like Gwen.

"If you do give part of your liver, it will grow back, and then that portion that you donated can save a life, somebody who needs a liver," said Lorraine Stiehl, CEO of American Liver Foundation.



If you are interested in learning more about the 'Living Donor Network,' visit the American Liver Foundation [website](#).

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