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Organic Garden Brings Community Together

ABC7 Salutes Penny Ellson



(ABC7)

July 16 — In Palo Alto, a story of illness, hope and community spirit. A group of volunteers is growing food for a very sick little girl, but to their surprise, the garden has inspired hundreds of others to help in any way they can. In this ABC Salute, Thuy Vu brings you the story of Sophia's garden.

www.sophiasgarden.org

She's only three years old. Yet Sophia Herzog Sachs has lived through more struggles than many of us will see in our lifetimes.

She was born with a rare genetic disease called Niemann-pick type A. It causes an enzyme disorder that hampers the function of her cells.

Karen Herzog, Sophia's mother: "She doesn't talk, doesn't walk and she has low muscle tone. She has difficulty swallowing."

Sophia's parents wanted to feed their daughter only organic food. Their neighbor, Penny Ellson, decided to plant an organic garden and e-mailed her community association for help.

Penny Ellson, neighbor: "I was amazed at the response. People wrote back and said yes, I'll help."

Dozens of people showed up in Sophia's back yard. Now, three years later, the garden has come to symbolize not only the love of a family for a sick child, but the love of strangers for a little girl in need.

Karen: "Very grateful and stunned that the neighbors would pull together like this."

Richard Sachs, Sophia's father: "It became clear that people are kind and people are empathetic and we all share a love and concern for our children."

The garden's herbs and vegetables are chopped, cooked with special spices, then liquefied. Sophia is fed hourly through a tube connected to a food pump. Her mother believes the organic diet has made a difference.

Karen: "She stopped spitting up and refusing food."

But she never stopped fighting - defying predictions by doctors that she wouldn't make it past two years old.

Sophia celebrated her third birthday in May. She gained two pounds in the past year, and Penny Ellson gained hope, amid the heartache.

Penny: "When we found out that Sophia was sick, you wanna do something. You wanna help your friends."

The circle of friends keeps growing. The garden inspired many other seeds of love, including an art project - prayer flags made by more than a hundred people.

And nurses volunteer their time. Medical researchers volunteer their expertise. What started as a garden has yielded an incredible community spirit.

Penny: "Planting the garden was an act of hope also, and I think Karen and Richard sort of draw from that, that this community shares their hope, that there is a future for Sophia and that they have support."

So we salute Penny Ellson and all the volunteers for their kindness and dedication in caring for Sophia. If you would like more information on Sophia's Garden, visit www.sophiasgarden.org.

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