

# Project **Stella**: Accelerating lifesaving cures for children with leukemia

[Help us raise \\$750,000](#) to bring critically needed treatments to children like **Ella**

**A**t Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, we're committed to finding cures for every cancer and every patient. Through a special initiative called Project **Stella**, our scientists are developing urgently needed treatments for children with acute myeloid leukemia (AML) — the deadliest of all pediatric cancers.

Project **Stella** is named for Stella Novotny, a vibrant little girl who lost her life to a rare form of AML at just four years old. After Stella's passing, her parents, Casey and Ed Novotny, launched Project **Stella** to help change the outcome for other children and families facing AML. Under the direction of Dr. Soheil Meshinchi, a pediatric AML expert at Fred Hutch and Stella's former physician, Project **Stella** is accelerating the development of targeted therapies for children with this disease.

Thanks to the solid foundation the Novotnys have built, in partnership with the Meshinchi Lab, Project **Stella** is able to reach more families. Just recently, the Siders family joined forces with the Project **Stella** team. Christina and Joe's 22-month-old daughter, **Ella**, is undergoing treatment for the same rare form

of AML that Stella had. Like the Novotny family, the Siders family is fiercely committed to defeating pediatric AML — because no child should ever have to endure cancer or its treatment.

Thanks to generous supporters of Project **Stella**, the Meshinchi Lab is making pivotal strides against childhood leukemia. Read on to learn more about this vital effort and how you can help bring cures to the littlest cancer patients.

## A rare and hard-to-treat leukemia

AML is a complex blood cancer with a 50% relapse rate. Current therapies for children with AML are similar to those for adults, because many clinicians view AML as the same disease regardless of age. But these therapies are often toxic for children and can cause lifelong side effects, including infertility, heart failure, and shortened life expectancy.

Dr. Meshinchi has shown that pediatric AML is vastly genetically different than adult AML. For instance, CBF/GLIS AML — the form of leukemia that Stella and Ella were diagnosed with — contains a genetic mutation that is only seen in infants and children

## Stella Novotny: The inspiration behind Project Stella

Project Stella is named for Stella Novotny, an unforgettable little girl who lost her life to AML weeks after her fourth birthday. Stella was a natural-born performer who made life her stage. Whether she was dressing up as a superhero, dancing to Lady Gaga, or running around with her brother, George, she brought a larger-than-life spirit to everything she did. Today, Stella's spirit is the driving force behind Fred Hutch's efforts to cure pediatric AML.



younger than five. CBF/GLIS AML is notoriously resistant to cancer therapies. Tragically, many children with this subtype of AML do not survive.

### New hope for children with AML

With support from Project *Stella* donors, the Meshinchi Lab has made important advances in the fight against pediatric leukemia. They have assembled the world's largest collection of biological samples from children with CBF/GLIS AML, and have used this resource to identify more than 50 proteins implicated in the disease. The team has also developed desperately-needed research tools, such as cell lines and mouse models, to study the unique genetics of CBF/GLIS AML.

Recently, the Meshinchi Lab identified four key genes that are present in CBF/GLIS AML. These genes are highly expressed in cancer cells but have limited-to-no expression in normal blood cells, meaning it may be possible to target them with drugs while sparing damage to healthy cells. In addition, these genes all express proteins that may respond to a special class of drugs called antibody-drug conjugates, or ADCs.

To explore this hypothesis, the team is seeking to test the effectiveness of seven specific ADCs in research models containing CBF/GLIS AML cells. These ADCs are all currently undergoing clinical trials

for other cancers, and the team plans to work with the appropriate pharmaceutical companies to obtain access to these drugs.

If this study is successful, it would create a path for repurposing these ADCs to treat Ella and other children with CBF/GLIS AML. Because treatments are so urgently needed for this disease, the Meshinchi Lab would aim to complete this work in six months.

### Your opportunity to save lives

**Thanks to our visionary supporters, we have already raised \$365,000 toward Project Stella's \$2 million overall goal. However, in order for Dr. Meshinchi's team to immediately begin testing the drugs that look most promising against CBF/GLIS AML, we need to raise an additional \$725,000 toward our \$2 million goal. [Your gift will honor Stella's inspiring legacy by helping bring cures to Ella and so many others like her.](#)**

Thank you for your generosity. Please contact Mike Pratapas for questions or to learn more about Project *Stella* at Fred Hutch.

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### Ella Siders: Tiny but mighty

Ella is a playful, sweet, and joyous little girl who was diagnosed with a rare form of AML at just 14 months old. Since being diagnosed, Ella has undergone multiple rounds of chemotherapy and a stem cell transplant, and her treatment journey has been grueling. But despite everything, Ella has maintained her bright spirit and goofy approach to life. Her favorite activities include dancing to Paul Simon, playing peekaboo, and swinging outside with her brother and sister right next to her.

