

The Team Emery Bear Drive Story

It all began 8 years ago, on a typical December Sunday morning attending church with my family. I went to my Sunday School class and the pastor there talked about the presence of God, NOT presents and Christmas, how they were similar, yet very different. At the end of the sermon, the pastor gave us a simple challenge... to give more than we received that year for Christmas. Well, my immediate thought was "I'm spoiled and get a ton of gifts! How am I going to be able to give more than I receive this year?" I had an idea to give one teddy bear to Phoenix Children's Hospital (PCH), that had helped me so much growing up with all my medical issues. As a small child until I was 7, I was in and out of the hospital. I was born with a hole in my heart and severe valve issues. I was born the very end of October, and my first year, I spent from the day after Thanksgiving until 2 days before Christmas in the hospital, and that was a regular occurrence for me and my family. I had my first open-heart surgery at just 6 months of age, before going on to have three more at 2 1/2, 4, and 6 1/2 old. So, if I could give back to the hospital that had helped me so much, that's exactly what I wanted to do! That was a question I pondered in my head for a couple hours before bringing it to my mom's attention. She said to just pray about it, so that's what I did. The next morning on the way to school, she brought up the thought about the one bear, and suggested I did the whole hospital! I loved the idea and was up for the challenge. After she dropped me off at school, she made a post on Facebook, not saying that we were collecting bears, but just our conversation that morning. This part is what I call "Power to the People!" Well, within 15 minutes, the post had over 45 comments saying "I can give you 3 bears!" or "I can have my girl scout troop collect for you!" And just like that, the Team Emery Bear Drive was born.

We aimed each year to collect as many bears as the hospital had in beds. So, our first year, our goal was 400 bears because PCH only had 400 beds. It was crazy, we had under 2 weeks to collect over 400 bears... I thought it would be impossible. I continued to pray and God continued to answer... We were able to raise 485 bears in a span of just under 2 weeks. The following year, PCH expanded their facility now being the 3rd largest children's hospital in the entire United States which quickly raised our goal from 400 to 1,000. The following year, we surpassed our goal of 1,000, collecting 1,200 bears! 3rd year, same goal, 1,600 bears. 4th year, same goal, but we didn't just hit 1,000.... we didn't even just double it... we were able to raise over 2,200 bears. Absolutely incredible. We then realized, of course the local Arizona children hospitals love our donations... but what if we could donate to other hospitals outside of just Arizona.. I mean, we don't need an extra 1,200 bears going to a hospital when another hospital could be in dire need of any and all donations! So, we had enough bears to make it nationwide, and that's exactly what we did! Three years ago, we donated bears to Texas, Wisconsin, Nevada, Missouri, and of course, Arizona. With all the states combined, our goal was 1,600 bears... and we raised 3,994 bears all together. We almost tripled our original goal with all the other states support! It's an incredible thing to be a part of! I am very blessed to have started this great cause. Two years ago, we donated to those 5 states, plus we added California and Utah. Our goal was 4,500 bears, and we raised 7, 889 bears, donating them to 22 hospitals throughout those 7 states. We also donated bears to the Mesa Fire Department so when they were out on call and came across a child, they could give them a bear. Lastly, we donated bears to an adoption facility in downtown Phoenix... when a mother would come to give up her baby because she understood it was what's best for her child, the facility would give her a bear to take home, so she wasn't leaving completely empty handed. Last year, we were able to successfully donate another almost

8,000 teddy bears, changing the lives of so many more. In the year of 2017, Team Emery hope to continue the trend and raise over 10,000 bears!

Team Emery has raised 25,504 bears in 7 short years... That's equivalent to 25,504 families touched. It's crazy, what started as a simple 5th graders idea, turned into a non-profit organization that will help millions of sick kids across the country, giving them much more than a teddy bear... we will be giving them hope, courage, and strength to get through their struggles. Team Emery Bear Drive... Unstoppable.