

Jesse White promotes organ donation at Bloomington library



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BLOOMINGTON - When she was 8 years old, Mikahla Thornton was so debilitated from a heart condition that she couldn't even walk the halls of Colene Hoose Elementary School. A heart transplant three years ago saved Thornton's life, and she was one of several who joined Secretary of State Jesse White on Saturday at the Bloomington Public Library to help promote organ donation.

Almost 5,000 people in Illinois are waiting for an organ transplant and 300 die each year waiting, said White.

Thornton was so weak from the cardiomyopathy she was born with that she had to move from Bloomington to St. Louis to be closer to St. Louis Children's Hospital while she waited for her new heart. "I was in the last stage and really needed it," Thornton said of her transplant.

Thornton says the transplant gave her "more life." "I learned how to ride a bike, swim and roller-skate," she said. She also uses her new energy to actively promote the Secretary of State's Organ/Tissue Donor Registry.

In part because of the efforts of individuals like Thornton and groups like the McLean County Life Goes On Committee, Illinois now boasts one of the largest registries in the nation, with more than 5 million people registering since 2006.

By registering with Illinois' "first-person consent" registry, a donor's decision is now legally binding, meaning family consent is no longer required for those age 18 and older.

"It lets everyone know it was your wish," said Nicole Hoffman, co-chair of the McLean County Life Goes on Committee.

Besides helping the recipients, Larry Lefferts of Normal said donation helps the donor's family. Leffert's son, John, died from an aneurism at age 22.

While John's organs could not be donated, his eyes, bones and other tissues were given to 37 recipients. The Secretary of State's office estimates thousands are waiting for a tissue donation to improve their quality of life.

Among those 37 that Lefferts helped were two people who did not have sight who can now see and a man who can play with his children pain-free because he was able to have his knee rebuilt from John's donation.

Larry Lefferts said there has been “deep impact” on his family from the decision to donate whatever could be donated. “Immense comfort and healing” comes from the donation, he said, because of the good that “blossoms” from the loss.

To join the registry, go to www.LifeGoesOn.com, call 800-210-2106 or visit any driver services facility.