

South Dakota National Guard

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April 15, 2012

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Six-year-old girl receives hero award

VOLGA, S.D. – The South Dakota National Guard Enlisted Association honored Ashlyn Tangen, 6, of Bruce, with the Young Hero award for her courage and bravery at the Sioux Valley Elementary School, in Volga, April 13.

The SDNGEA sponsors the Young Heroes program, honoring children who have displayed courage and bravery while battling life-threatening diseases, illness or injuries. Ashlyn overcame an infection with E. coli 0157 and hemolytic uremic syndrome, or HUS.

Six Soldiers presented Ashlyn with a medal and framed certificate in front of her kindergarten class, who supported her during her 30-day stay in the hospital by sending cards and photos.

“It is an honor to present this award to a very special girl,” said Capt. Rebecca Trygstad. “Ashlyn is a very brave girl that showed tremendous courage while fighting an illness. Her determination to get through displayed personal courage and bravery. These are the same values we live by as a Soldier.”

The Young Heroes program, founded in the early 1990s, pays tribute to the courage and dignity of real-life heroes ages 3-18 whose tremendous struggle might otherwise go unnoticed.

Ashlyn’s illness began after her first couple of days of kindergarten. She began to have symptoms of diarrhea and a possible urinary-tract infection, said Ashlyn’s mother, Julie Tangen.

“We were sent home from the clinic with antibiotics but she did not improve,” said Julie. “So the next morning we took her to the emergency room and a couple of tests later it was confirmed that Ashlyn contracted E. coli and was then admitted to the Brookings Hospital.”

E. coli is known to be contracted by eating contaminated food or water and by contact with fecal material from infected people or animals.

“No one can tell exactly when or where Ashlyn contracted E. coli but our best guess would be from our week spent at the State Fair,” said Julie. “Ashlyn loves to work with animals and we suspect that it may have come from her not washing her hands before eating.”

Ashlyn began to swell up with fluids after a few days at the Brookings Hospital. Doctors then recommended she go to the Sanford Children’s Hospital in Sioux Falls.

“We spent a few days in at the Children’s Hospital and things began to get even worse,” said Julie. “Ashlyn’s E. coli infection developed into HUS, which leads to kidney failure.”

The doctor informed us that HUS is a severe, life-threatening complication that damages the kidneys and only occurs in about 10 percent of infants and children infected with E. coli, said Julie.

“Since Ashlyn’s kidneys were shutting down, she gained about six pounds of fluid,” said Julie. “In order to get rid of the excess fluid, they had to insert a catheter port to start hemodialysis. The doctor told us to expect about two weeks of dialysis before the kidneys would begin to function.”

After two weeks, Ashlyn’s kidneys were still not functioning. The doctor began the talk of long-term dialysis, which would require her to return to the hospital three times a week for dialysis. This also meant that Ashlyn’s kidneys were more than likely not going to recover and she would need a transplant.

The doctor decided to try a few more dialysis treatments before Ashlyn’s parents would need to make a decision.

For two and half weeks, everyday for three hours, Ashlyn endured hemodialysis. This process cleaned her blood through a filter to remove waste and water, mimicking what her kidneys would do if they were functioning, said Julie.

“Thankfully, a few more dialysis treatments were all that was needed and her kidneys starting to produce urine,” said Julie. “I have never been so excited for my child to pee. I kept telling Ashlyn the more days that she continues to go potty, the more days we could skip dialysis.”

Eight months have now passed since Ashlyn was released from the hospital.

“The doctor will continue to monitor her closely for at least a year by checking her blood work,” said Julie “He believes that her kidneys will make a full recovery but there aren’t any guarantees that she won’t have kidney issues later in life.”

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120317-A-CW157-001: Members of the South Dakota National Guard salute Ashlyn Tangen, 6, of Bruce, for her courage and bravery at the Sioux Valley Elementary School, in Volga, April 13, 2012. The SDNG Enlisted Association sponsors the Young Heroes program, honoring children who have displayed courage and bravery while battling life-threatening diseases, illness or injuries. Ashlyn overcame an infection with E. coli 0157 and hemolytic uremic syndrome, the program pays tribute to the courage and dignity of real life heroes whose tremendous struggle might otherwise go unnoticed. (SDNG photo by Staff Sgt. Theanne Tangen) (RELEASED)



120317-A-CW157-002: Members of the South Dakota National Guard gather to present Ashlyn Tangen, 6, of Bruce, with a Young Heroes Medal at Sioux Valley Elementary School, in Volga, April 13, 2012. The SDNG Enlisted Association sponsors a Young Hero program, honoring children who have displayed courage and bravery while battling life-threatening diseases, illness or injuries. Ashlyn overcame an infection with E. coli 0157 and hemolytic uremic syndrome, the program pays tribute to the courage and dignity of real life heroes whose tremendous struggle might otherwise go unnoticed. (SDNG photo by Staff Sgt. Theanne Tangen) (RELEASED)

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