



BILLINGS GAZETTE

Woman dedicates herself to organ donations after son's heart transplant

Numbness took over Megan Truman when she heard her son would die without a heart transplant.

His viral illness was sudden and violent. A visit to the emergency room brought the jaw-dropping news he was suffering multiorgan failure.

Despite all Truman's years as a respiratory therapist, the doctor's words felt like a foreign language.

"You're out of your mind," she kept saying. "What are you talking about?"

Not long ago, her son was a healthy 25-year-old man. He was supposed to be enjoying a bachelor party in Arizona. He had a bright future.



Megan Truman listens to her son's new heart for the first time in 2023. Brandon McCaffree was 25 years old when he had his transplant.

Courtesy, Megan Truman

He was rushed to the University of Washington for medical care. Truman was with her son when his medical team announced they'd found a match for his transplant.

As overwhelmed and relieved as she was, looking at her son hooked up to busy machines keeping him alive, something else seized her: grief.

She excused herself, found a corner of the hospital, and sobbed. Her chest felt tight. The waves of tears wouldn't stop.

Brandon McCaffree, her son, was going to be OK, but she knows what it cost.

“Somebody else is losing their life,” she said.

That was in 2023. McCaffree is nearing the two-year anniversary of his new heart, and he's healing well, Truman said.

2025 also marks the two-year anniversary of Truman's career shift.



Turah resident Brandon McCaffree goes outside for the first time since his heart transplant. He received his heart transplant in February 2023 after a sudden viral illness.

Courtesy, Megan Truman

Not long after her son's successful transplant, Truman dedicated herself to helping patients in Montana as an organ recovery coordinator.

She works with [LifeCenter Northwest](#), a nonprofit that manages organ donations in Montana, Alaska, North Idaho and Washington.

The federally recognized and accredited organization was established in 1997 and serves around 11 million people, its fact sheet states.

LifeCenter Northwest works with over 50 Montana hospitals statewide, spokesperson Jenna Pringle said. Truman lives in Turah and works primarily in the Missoula area.

2024 was Montana's biggest year for organ donations on record, receiving 164 organ transplants from 60 Montanan donors. Each donor can save up to eight lives, LifeCenter Northwest estimates.



Megan Truman, 49, is from the Seattle area and has lived in or near Missoula for around 20 years. She attended Missoula College.
Courtesy, Megan Truman

As of Feb. 7, there are 178 patients in Montana waiting for a life-saving organ transplant.

Kidneys make up the highest need at 145 people, Pringle said. Six people need both a kidney transplant and a pancreas transplant, and one Montanan is waiting for a pancreas.

Six people wait for a new heart, three people wait for a lung transplant and 17 need a liver transplant.

As an organ recovery coordinator, Truman works directly with families of potential donors. Sometimes that means detailed explanations of the process or clearing up misconceptions. A lot of the time, it's listening.

For patients who weren't registered organ donors, she offers it as an idea. Not everyone is ready to talk about the end. However, she's often told about who the patient was as a person, what their wants and dreams were.

"He was such a giving person," Truman has been told. "She was such a light ... We want the ending of the story to be a little bit different."



Megan Truman smiles with her son, Brandon McCaffree, who received a heart transplant in 2023.

Courtesy, Megan Truman

If families agree to register their loved one as a donor, she works exclusively with them until a match is found. She shows the patient dignity and respect while organs are tested and carefully transported. She's a witness to grief.

It's heavy. She relishes painting and photography in her spare time. A passionate astronomer, she'll gaze at nebulas — some of her favorite cosmic entities — and find solace that there's something much grander than her out there.

But it's worth it, she said. When she was a respiratory therapist, she found an honor in supporting someone into their final days, but once a patient died, that was the end.

Now, she sees the hope that persists in death, she said. There's no greater gift than knowing someone out there, just like her son, will get that chance at life.

The patients and families who offer that hope deserve respect and care. She wants to give that to them.

"We can't take lightly the gift of life," she said. "You're saving someone's life. What a beautiful thing. What an honor."

To learn more about organ donation or register to become a donor, visit donatelifemt.org.