



## 'I have a lot to look forward to'

**OneMatch Network  
appeals for donors  
to help patients  
needing stem cell  
transplants**

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Jessica Pessoa, a  
911 dispatcher who  
has helped  
hundreds of  
Torontonians in  
medical  
emergencies, now  
needs help.



BILL SANDFORD FOR THE TORONTO STAR

Jessica Pessoa, 22, who has leukemia, is searching for a bone marrow donor through the OneMatch Network run by Canadian Blood Services.

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Pessoa was diagnosed with leukemia at age 15 and was treated at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children.

She went into remission, but two months ago the leukemia came back and she finds herself battling it once more.

The 22-year-old has been unable to find a family match and needs to find a non-related donor to receive a bone marrow transplant and blood transfusions.

"I have a lot to look forward to in life," she said in a phone interview.

Yesterday morning, the representatives from all three divisions of Toronto's emergency services – EMS, fire and police – held an event to show their support for her and others on the waiting list seeking donors.

Pessoa, like 70 per cent of leukemia patients, is searching for a donor through the OneMatch Network, a national program managed by Canadian Blood Services.

"Volunteer donors who are willing to help stem cell transplant patients can register online at <http://www.onematch.ca/>," said Mary-Lynn Pride, co-ordinator for the OneMatch Network program in central Ontario.

Pride explained that after donors register online, they receive a phone call to ensure they are medically eligible to proceed with the program.

Pessoa has worked as an Emergency Medical Services dispatcher for the City of Toronto for two years.

She hopes "as many people as possible visit OneMatch.ca and sign up to be in the registry."

For the next 30 weeks, she will be treated with weekly chemotherapy, in addition to pills, in order to beat the leukemia.

"I have been keeping a positive spirit and trying to stay strong and get through each day," she said.

Yesterday's event was held at the Toronto EMS and Toronto Fire headquarters.

"It allowed us to outreach Jessica's co-workers and bring awareness to them that there is such an immediate need to register as OneMatch donors, as well as to be involved with regular blood donation," Pride said.

"It explained to them that by registering as donors, they might have the potential to save the life of a patient like Jessica."

Pessoa believes the event provided a lot of awareness.

"I am very happy that so many people were there to support me and other leukemia patients," she said.

Last year, more than 230 Canadians received stem cell transplants from unrelated donors, Pride said.

Pessoa had to stop working at EMS two months ago as her treatments began.

"Before I was helping other people – now I need other people to help me," she said.

"Become a donor."