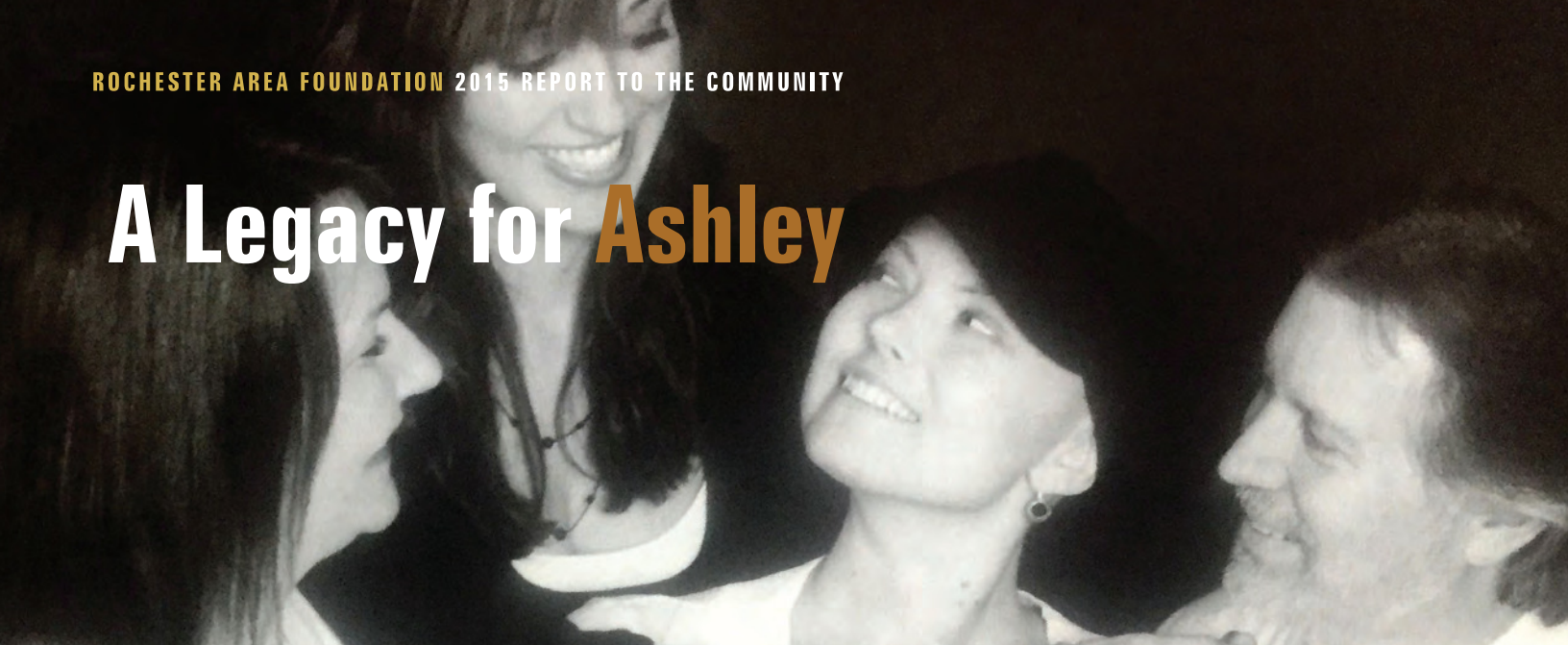


# A Legacy for Ashley



For the Hanson family, the value of all people is summed up in that famous Winnie-The-Pooh quote, "Promise me you'll always remember: You're braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think." Ron and Jody Hanson know firsthand that those who have experienced the death of a child, a sister or brother, or even a grandchild will never be the same. But knowing that you can invest in the community, invest in the recollection of someone's life, even if only a small part—and help keep your loved one's memory alive—is a wonderful thing.

Seven years ago, the Hansons lost their daughter, Ashley, to cancer. Ashley was a dedicated 23-year-old student at Augsburg College who dreamed of teaching at the elementary level but was unable to graduate and fulfill her dream. Her parents, accepting a posthumous degree on her behalf from Augsburg, determined that her dream could live on by helping others who are less fortunate but who share Ashley's desire to help children through teaching.

Ashley always had a special love for children, say her parents. When she was young, she was a popular babysitter, because she had a fun, active imagination and related well to children. According to her father, Ashley was vibrant, caring, and confident. "She always looked out for and protected her younger sister," he says. "When new kids started in school, she would befriend them and make them feel welcome."

In high school, Ashley helped Mrs. Oman, her former kindergarten teacher, in the classroom once a week as part of a career assignment. Mrs. Oman was so impressed by her former student's dedication and skills that she encouraged Ashley to pursue a career as a teacher. Ashley enrolled at Rochester's Augsburg College and later transferred to the Twin Cities to finish her education. While in the Cities, she worked at a Kindercare, where she felt at home teaching and caring for the kids. She was so successful that the parents of those children followed her on her difficult health journey through a Caring Bridge website, letting Ashley know how much she was missed. Thanks to the foresight of her parents, Ashley's mission lives on through her parents' generosity and the support of the Rochester Area Foundation.

In 2015 Ron heard a presentation about how the Foundation can provide an effective vehicle for memorials and legacies. What piqued his interest was the powerful difference between a onetime gift and the establishment of an ongoing fund that would both provide grants now and forever in Ashley's memory: "It's important to know that our money is invested wisely, that the funds will grow, and that we can use the interest to help others," says Hanson. "Knowing how long the Foundation has been around, and the care they give in managing funds, gives us peace of mind. Even when we are no longer around, we know the Foundation will be there, and that our daughter's legacy will continue."

The Ashley Marie Hanson Memorial Fund helps those interested in and working toward a career in early childhood education—those who sometimes do not have the means for books and tuition. In addition, since a lack of resources can make it difficult to properly equip classrooms, funds will help needy teachers and students purchase classroom supplies out of their own pockets. The Hansons believe a small gesture can go a long way and that people who are given a chance to succeed and improve their quality of life do.

If you are interested in community philanthropy or creating an endowed donor fund to commemorate the accomplishments of an individual who was an integral part of our community, contact the Rochester Area Foundation at 507-282-0203 to start the conversation.

