



Search

Navigation My Links

- Cisco Employee Connection >
- News >
- CEC Internal News >
- Advanced Technologies
- Competitor
- Core Technologies
- Corporate Initiatives
- Culture
 - Selected Article
- Employee Updates
- Industry News
- News@Cisco
- Organizational Announcements

Cisco TelePresence Helps One Family Reach Out to Another

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Using Cisco TelePresence, Diane Adams and daughter Danielle (in RTP) meet with T.S. Khurana and daughter Anya (in San Jose) to talk about juvenile diabetes.

The hectic holiday season was fast approaching, and Diane Adams was engaged in an activity known to many a parent: scurrying through the shopping malls with her daughter Danielle in tow. She'd noticed recently that the 4-year-old was a bit lethargic and wanting a lot to drink, but she attributed these things to the fact that they had been so much on the go.

But then it seemed that Danielle might have a virus. Whatever it was, it appeared minor enough at first, but then suddenly it made the little girl sicker and a lot more lethargic.

The hospital diagnosis that followed was a devastating one: Danielle had juvenile diabetes. Her pancreas had stopped doing its job of producing the insulin that helps to regulate blood sugar level. She would henceforth be dependent on insulin injections to keep her body chemistry in balance.

That was eight years ago, and life has been anything but simple for the family since then, according to Adams, the Vice President of Human Resources in Worldwide Sales. As a child, Danielle has had to learn how to coordinate insulin, exercise, and every piece of food that she eats to keep her blood sugar from going too high or too low.

Danielle checks her blood sugar level 8 to 10 times per day by means of a finger prick.

"If you calculate over the past eight years how many times she's checked her finger, it comes out to something like 32,000 times," Adams says.

Bedtime is particularly tricky because, while she is asleep, Danielle is more



Danielle poses with the Adams family's Walk to Cure Diabetes team.

Singing for a Cure

Watch and listen to Danielle's personal rendition of "[Someday](#)" on YouTube

Danielle and her sister Kristen created this video about the day that there will be a cure for diabetes.

Helping to Find a Cure

If you would like to help out, go to the [JDRF website](#) and click Donate in the Walk to Cure Diabetes section (under the shoe) and type "Danielle Adams" and select North Carolina in the State drop-down menu.

vulnerable to seizures that she might otherwise feel coming on when she is awake. "During the night, I get up every two hours to check Danielle to make sure her blood sugar's OK so that she doesn't 'crash,'" Adams says.

Displaying Her Positive Attitude Far and Near

The good news is that Danielle has embraced her situation with a positive spirit that has made her an ambassador of sorts for living successfully with juvenile diabetes. She has been speaking about diabetes to groups—often hundreds of people at a time—since she was 6, according to her mother. She is active with fundraising through the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) and has even spoken to Congress about the search for a cure.

Recently, the 12-year-old had an opportunity to reach out to others in a brand new way: through Cisco TelePresence.

The opportunity arose this past summer when T.S. Khurana, Senior Director, Customer Value Chain Management, and his wife Madhu learned that their very active 8-year-old daughter Anya had juvenile diabetes. "I think that 'devastated' is not too modest a term to be using for how we felt," he says. "We were just reeling. At first we didn't know what to do."

And, of course, Anya was having a tough time too. "Kids sometimes shut out that which is overwhelming or really scary or something that they just can't understand," says Khurana. "I think for the first week or two, she thought, 'I'll take my tummy shots, and I'll be better.'"

A Long-Distance Relationship Begins

The Khurana parents, while overwhelmed, were determined to remain positive and reach out to others for information so as to best help their child. It was about four weeks after Anya's diagnosis that Khurana, through the assistance of Kate Elfrink, wife of Cisco Services EVP Wim Elfrink, had the good fortune to be put in touch with Adams.

The meeting helped my wife and I to get out some of the fear, frustration, and anger, and sense of 'how could this have happened?' My wife broke down a couple times emotionally, and I felt like it too. But Diane helped us through that, and I can't overemphasize, when you see someone, you just connect with them on a different level

T.S. Khurana,
Senior
Director,
Customer

The Khurana family live in Bangalore but were in Silicon Valley at the time for the birth of their third child. Adams was on the opposite coast at Cisco's RTP campus. Given the distance and the subject matter, Khurana knew right away that he wanted a Cisco TelePresence meeting with Adams.

During that meeting, Adams talked to the Khuranas about juvenile diabetes research and the search for a cure, and about the insulin pump and continuous blood glucose monitor that currently make life easier for a diabetic. The biggest impact for the Khuranas, however, was Adams' encouraging presence in the Cisco TelePresence room.

Says Khurana, "The meeting helped my wife and I to get out some of the fear, frustration, and anger, and sense of 'how could this have happened?' My wife broke down a couple times emotionally, and I felt like it too. But Diane helped us through that, and I can't

"For me," says Adams, "it was an opportunity to reassure them that this would be OK, that their child was going to live a wonderful, fulfilling life, and that they were going to be OK as well."

Cisco TelePresence Brings the Girls Closer Together

But Adams went a step further. She suggested that the two girls themselves take advantage of the technology to meet, and so, the very next day, the 12-year-old and the 8-year-old encountered each other in a Cisco TelePresence environment.

At first, the parents encouraged the girls a bit with suggestions about what to share and what to ask. While Cisco TelePresence was a brand new experience for Danielle and a relatively new one for Anya, both girls quickly progressed to having their very own conversation.

"The discussion just kind of took off on its own," says Khurana. "It's interesting, but children look right past the technology. When I see adults get into a TelePresence room, they will marvel over it and say, 'Oh my gosh, I can't believe it.' But for kids it just becomes a routine part of the interaction."

According to Adams, Danielle reassured Anya that she could still participate in all of her favorite sports and dance activities. And while no child likes to stand out as different, Danielle encouraged Anya to tell her friends so that they might recognize the signs of low blood sugar.

Khurana was struck by how quickly the energy in the room moved his daughter past basic questions like "What do you do when you have low blood sugar?" to more intriguing and thoughtful questions like "How do you conceal your pump?"

The beauty of the Cisco TelePresence meeting, according to Khurana, was that Danielle could actually show Anya how she conceals her pump with the aid of a line of clothing known as Pump Wear. Danielle went on to show Anya her most recent prize from the prize box that her mother lets her pick from when she successfully keeps her blood sugar in the desired range. And Danielle also showed Anya a beautiful new purse, which she gets every year to hold her diabetes gear and juices.

Providing Advice and Motivation, and Lifting Emotions

Says Danielle of the experience with Anya, "I enjoyed being able to meet and help someone like me, plus she was fun. We had lots in common. Anya liked the idea of getting a new purse every year to keep your diabetes stuff in. She also liked the idea of decorating your insulin pump with fake diamonds. And we both liked the Jonas Brothers and Ashley Tisdale, one of the actresses on the Disney Channel."

Anya is equally enthusiastic. "Danielle was the first other child I saw and talked to that had juvenile diabetes," she says. "TelePresence was like meeting her in person. It was awesome."

Khurana adds that beyond what Anya was able to gain in terms of valuable advice and motivation, there was an emotional impact to the Cisco TelePresence meeting that cannot be underestimated.

"Danielle came into the room fresh from a vacation in Hawaii, wearing this very bright, colorful dress with her fancy little purse," Khurana says. "I think, if nothing else, Anya walked away with the understanding that there's another child who's

been going through this for eight years, and this girl is clearly leading a reasonably normal life, and I can too. It was real for her. Had she not seen Danielle, there's no way she would have walked away with that."

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