

# UW Health: “Miracle Baby” celebrates one-year anniversary of life-saving liver transplant

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**MADISON, Wis.** – Shortly after Jenny Hougom gave birth in August 2019, her newborn son, Lucas, was diagnosed with congenital cytomegalovirus (CMV), a relatively rare virus in newborns that attacked his liver, bringing him to the brink of death on multiple occasions and leaving him in dire need of a life-saving organ transplant.

One year ago today, Lucas Hougom got that second chance at life, thanks not only to a family friend who donated a part of her liver to Lucas, but to the team of UW Health doctors and nurses who never gave up on Lucas or his family.

Lucas spent the first four months of his life in and out of hospitals, as various doctors tried desperately to get the virus and his liver failure under control. But it became obvious by early December, after being admitted to University Hospital in Madison, that Lucas was going to need a liver transplant soon. Knowing that a deceased donor liver that could fit Lucas’ small body would likely not come in time, the transplant team told the Hougoms that a living liver donor was likely the only chance they had to save Lucas’ life.

The Hougoms posted an urgent plea on social media, which resulted in more than 100 people from around the country offering to help. But none of them were a good candidate, until a former high-school classmate of Jenny’s came forward—even though her husband was deployed overseas and she has two small children— and was determined to be a good match.

“If we didn’t have a live liver donor program and a very generous and motivated donor willing to give so much of herself, Lucas certainly would not be here today,” says Dr. Tony D’Alessandro, one of the UW Health surgeons who performed the liver transplant on Lucas. “And to see Lucas growing and developing today the way any one year old would is truly remarkable.”

Dr. Katryn Furuya, medical director for the UW Health pediatric liver program, agrees that Lucas’ case was remarkable, but given all the setbacks and obstacles that the team had to overcome, she takes it even one step farther.

“I’ve been in practice for 30 years and I have never seen anything like this ,” Furuya says. “I don’t know too many transplant surgeons who would have attempted what they did on such a small child, but the lengths to which our surgeons went to save Lucas’ life are

Lucas Hougom is believed to be the first pediatric patient to be transplanted while still having active CMV, and his parents say they will never forget the selflessness of his donor and the tireless dedication shown by everyone at UW Health and the American Family Children’s Hospital who helped the entire Hougom family find the strength they needed to make it through.

“Lucas has taught us all what it means to be strong, and he continues to be such a tough cookie through it all,” Hougom says. “But while this story is ultimately about our son, it’s also a story about the strength and determination of his donor and the transplant team at UW Health. We have so much appreciation for them. Lucas is alive because of their gifts, and we will be forever grateful.”