

Emily Progin, Content Manager
eprogin@helphopelive.org / 800.642.8399
Release: Immediate

LIVING WITH MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY, WOMAN EMBODIES HOPE

37-Year-Old Nicole Sanders Embraces Life and Dances in the Storm

HENDERSONVILLE, Tenn.—Nicole Sanders is an athletic, positive, and independent 37-year-old pursuing her lifelong dream of helping children. She's also living proof of hope after a life-changing diagnosis. Living with muscular dystrophy, Nicole has found ways to adapt, overcome, and embrace life, from continuing to give back as an educator to performing with adaptive dance groups.

In 2023, Nicole's challenges with muscle weakness culminated in a shocking diagnosis: limb-girdle muscular dystrophy. As she transitioned to using mobility aids and a wheelchair, she chose to focus not on what she'd lost but on what life still held for her in the future.

With a master's in early childhood education, she works in early intervention as a development therapist, assisting kids with disabilities. On the weekends, she teaches Sunday school for 5-year-olds.

Nicole knew she couldn't let the diagnosis stand in the way of her lifelong dream of helping kids and families. She committed to adapting, finding a new way to do everything she loved.

"I have moments when I break down and cry," said Nicole, "but I've learned to embrace that while this diagnosis is part of who I am, it doesn't define me."

Instead of confining her, Nicole says her wheelchair is the key to greater independence and freedom. She participates in adaptive sports like baseball and basketball and performs with adaptive dance groups, challenging the public's notion of what life with a disability like muscular dystrophy can look like.

There's one challenge remaining that she can't adapt to overcome: Nicole currently wrangles multiple mobility devices and her own body into a regular-sized car every time she wishes to meet up with friends or pursue a dance opportunity.

Insurance won't cover the cost of an adaptive van she can roll into while in her own wheelchair, leaving Nicole on the hook for \$50,000 out of pocket to bring an accessible van within reach.

That's why she started fundraising with the trusted national nonprofit Help Hope Live. Donations can be made at: <https://helphopelive.org/campaign/25098/>

While muscular dystrophy continues to make daily life challenging and often less accessible, Nicole takes every obstacle in stride. Her adaptive dance team was recently invited to perform at a local baseball game, and she shared that she is now pursuing open mic opportunities, expressing herself on stage while embracing disability pride.

"Hope is the strength to believe that something better can come," she shared.

"Dancing in the storm, smiling through the tears, and knowing I am not done yet."

Unlike a GoFundMe campaign, donations to Help Hope Live are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law, and all funds raised will be administered by the nonprofit to cover verified medical and related expenses. Help Hope Live verifies medical and financial need for every patient.

Help Hope Live is a national nonprofit that specializes in engaging communities in secure, tax-deductible fundraising campaigns for people who need a transplant or are affected by a catastrophic injury or illness. Since 1983, campaigns organized by Help Hope Live have raised over \$193 million to pay patient expenses, assisting more than 25,000 patient families.

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