

# AMANI

## 9-years-old, “Birthday Girl!”

Amani celebrated her 9th birthday with a “Hello Kitty” themed party. She decorated her room with Hello Kitty Happy Birthday banners, streamers, and balloons; wore a Hello Kitty party hat and ate Georgetown Cupcakes on Hello Kitty dessert plates. The door to her room was covered with a big, colorful poster that said, “Happy Birthday from Hope for Henry” announcing to everyone on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the East Tower at Children’s National’s Center for Cancer and Blood Disorders that inside there was a birthday girl celebrating her special day.

Sickle cell anemia has made Amani a frequent patient at Children’s National since she was just a few weeks old. As a young girl, Amani’s severe phobia of needle sticks made her essential treatments traumatic. It took six or seven care providers to take blood samples as she fought back against her mom, nurses, and doctors.

Over time and thanks to the Children’s National team—and specifically Hope for Henry Child Life Specialist Carolyn Schneiders Fung—Amani has become a cooperative partner in her own care. Whenever Amani needs her, Carolyn is there to distract, soothe and entertain—often even waiting for her to arrive for an 8 a.m. appointment with an iPad loaded with Justin Bieber tunes and Amani’s favorite games.

Today as a middle-schooler, Amani might not be totally aware of how she came to cope with her lifelong condition but she can definitely tell you about all the fun-filled moments of escape Hope for Henry has provided. Just take Halloween, where soon after surgeons removed her spleen and gallbladder, Amani, dressed as Disney Princess Tiana—Georgetown Cupcake in hand—flashed her broad smile for her care-givers and her mom, Erica.

Erica credits Hope for Henry for giving her daughter much needed “moments of pure happiness through a very difficult journey, so Amani can be a kid, not her illness.” After leaving the hospital, Erica and Amani found themselves in a homeless shelter. A fire had destroyed their home. The treasured possession that Amani clung to at the shelter—her Hello Kitty birthday box, decorations and all.



Improving outcomes for Washington, DC’s sickest children, Hope for Henry Foundation brings smiles, laughter and joy to kids with cancer and other serious illnesses at Children’s National Medical Center and MedStar Georgetown University Hospital. Its year-round programming promotes comfort, care and recovery for these kids and their families.

Founded in 2003 and led by social innovator, patient advocate and author, Laurie Strongin, Hope for Henry has served more than 13,000 children in the Washington, DC metropolitan area and around the country.

[www.hopeforhenry.org](http://www.hopeforhenry.org)