



Courtesy Karri Andersen Karri Andersen, who has written a book for kids and parents about dealing with diabetes, reads her book to a group of children at the Diabetes Clubhouse.

Utah mom helps kids understand type 1 diabetes

Sharing knowledge » Her daughter was diagnosed at age 4, and Karri Andersen wanted others to understand the disease.

By Megan Gessel

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An active 12-year-old fond of dancing and four-wheeling, Kindra Andersen blends into her sixth-grade class easily, except for a few particular elements.

Unlike her peers who rue the subject, Kindra loves math. What's even more uncommon is that Kindra is the subject of a published book and a paperback with no ordinary purpose. This children's book is dedicated to telling Kindra's story to help other families in the same situation: living with type 1 diabetes.

Kindra was diagnosed at age 4 after presenting common symptoms, including prolonged sickness and a constant need to drink and urinate. The diagnosis was devastating, particularly for her mother, Karri Andersen.

"It's even harder for the parent than the kid," Andersen said. "You really feel when you're at the hospital like you're the only person this is happening to. ... Every finger poke and shot that your kid gets is traumatizing."

Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune disease in which the body's pancreas stops producing insulin, a hormone required to convert sugars, starches and other food into energy in the body. This requires added insulin and can lead to [damaging complications including blindness and strokes](#) if monitored poorly, according to the [Juvenile Diabetes Research Fund](#).

Kindra and her family quickly adopted the required schedule of insulin-carbohydrate balancing and finger pricks to check blood sugar levels, but it wasn't easy. As the family adjusted, Andersen found community support but noticed a lack of diabetes-related materials that children could understand. To address this, she wrote, illustrated and published the kid-friendly [I Have Diabetes](#) in 2009.

"It's wonderful for those kids to not feel like they're the only one and to have an actual book written for them," said Jennifer Willis-Blomquist of supply distributor [Diabetes Specialty Center](#).

A type 1 diabetic herself, Willis-Blomquist noted that the book helps diabetic children's peers to grasp the disease.

"You try to have as normal a life as possible, but it's difficult when you have equipment others don't understand," she said. "It's important to own the diabetes, and [the book] helps."

[Nearly 3 million Americans live with type 1 diabetes](#), and the rate of diagnosis for children under 14 is estimated to increase by 3 percent annually worldwide, according to the research fund.

For Lynda Peck, a mother of four and Eagle Mountain resident, managing diabetes has become routine; her husband and sons Liam, 5, and Jonah, 9, are type 1 diabetics. Peck stumbled across Andersen's book online, and said the volume helps address false stereotypes of the disease.

"There's a need for education out there that these kids that have [diabetes] didn't do anything to cause it. ... It's not a lifestyle they caused, but one they have to live with," Peck said. "There's just a lot of inaccurate perceptions about [Type 1] diabetes," and the book helps to allay them, she said.

Peck said the book educates those around diabetics to help when needed and that her children relate to how the book's illustrations look like a child's art. Peck's diabetic children were genetically predisposed to the disease, which was then triggered by a common cold virus.

Andersen, who has donated books through forums including the [University of Utah Diabetes Clinic](#) and in California and Washington, also hosts a club for families.

Privacy laws inhibit her from contacting patients directly, and the omnipresent funding concern makes book distribution a challenge.

"I've had opportunities with JDRF to do book signings but can't ask for funding or anything. ... I'd like to travel and give more," Andersen said. She distributes the books for free through groups and [her website](#), [ihavediabetesbook.com](#), and seeks a sponsor to help expand.

As for her part, Kindra can hardly remember a time when diabetes wasn't routine. Many of her classmates have read the book and understand, a benefit she credits to the book's simplicity.

"It like tells kids what diabetes is without freaking them out," Kindra said. "It tells kids ... that it's not as bad as you think."

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