

# The Talia Seidman Foundation links very ill children with classrooms and friends.

By Lee Drutman

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**LOWER MAKEFIELD** — When 7-year-old Talia Seidman died of brain cancer in December 1999, the world lost a bright young spirit who fought bravely against overwhelming odds.

Out of Talia's tragedy came the Talia Seidman Foundation. Ron and Andrea Seidman, Talia's parents, started the foundation so that chronic illness would not hinder children from seeing their friends, keeping up with schoolwork and leading a more normal life.

The foundation, which has already helped two children, provides support and funding for videoconferencing between a child's home and his or her classroom.

"What it's doing is bringing children out of an isolated world of medications and treatments and mental anguish and giving them an intellectually stimulating environment, so they'll be able to look forward to something rather than waking up and having to go through more treatment," Andrea Seidman said.

"Talia's spirit will continue on with all the children that will benefit."

This month, the Seidmans linked 9-year-old Lindsey Carr of Northeast Philadelphia to her third-grade class at William Loesche Elementary School making her one of a handful of children nationwide to attend school through videoconferencing. She attends the class in real time, raising her hand and chatting with friends when her teacher is not looking.

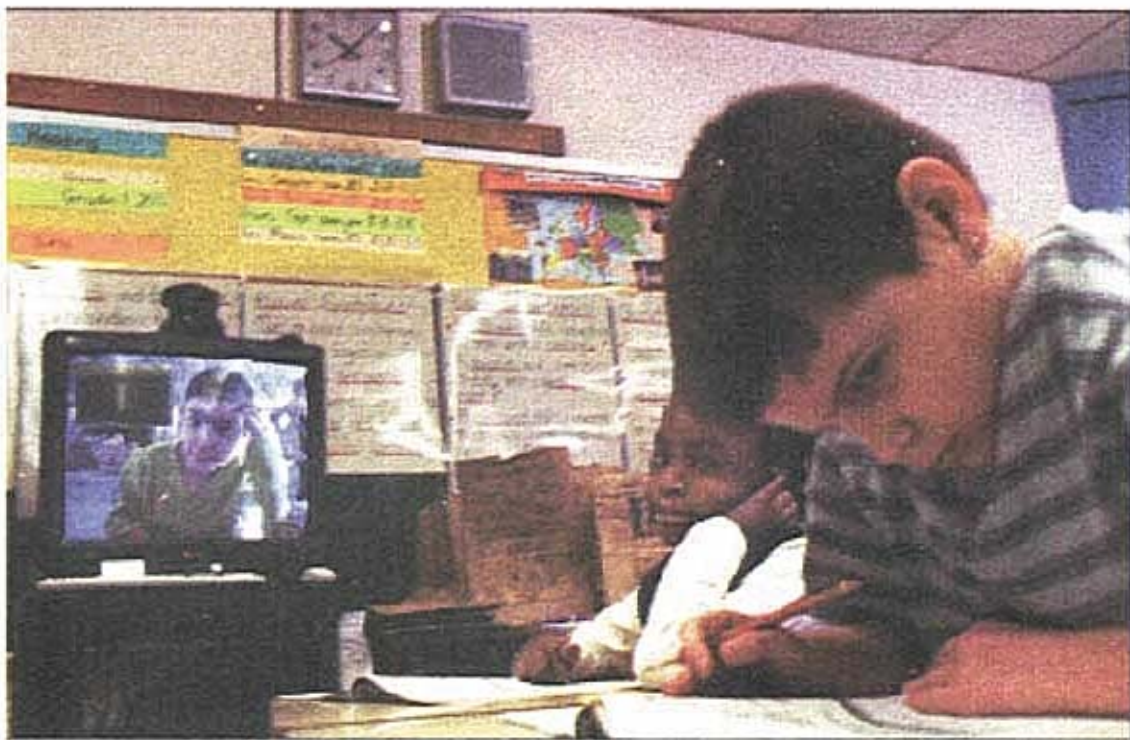
The technology provides a video camera and a video screen, both in Lindsey's home and her school, connected by Integrated Services Digital Network lines, Seidman said. The foundation, which is funded by contributions, rents the equipment for \$600 a month.

"I feel like I'm in school, and I really enjoy it," Lindsey said. She underwent a bone-marrow transplant last August as part of treatment for aplastic anemia. She is expected to return to school next fall, once her immune system recovers and doctors give her permission to be around other people.

"It makes me happy just to be with my friends," she said.

Last year, the Seidmans linked 9-year-old D.J. Carlino of East Marlborough with his third grade class. D.J., who was recovering from leukemia, is back in school.

Darlene Carr, Lindsey's mother, said she was amazed by the technology and by how happy it



**In her classroom via videoconferencing,** Lindsey Carr, 9, of Northeast Philadelphia, keeps up her work and can see and talk with classmates such as Tyler Green (center) and Shane Thomas as she recovers.

APRIL SAUL / Inquirer Staff Photographer



**The Seidman family,** Ron, Andrea and daughter Sima, 18, started the foundation in memory of their daughter Talia, who died of brain cancer.

APRIL SAUL / Inquirer Staff Photographer

has made her daughter.

"Before, she had no energy level, and there was not too much for her to do," she said. "Now, she wakes up in the morning, ready to go. ... She's like a different kid. Even the immediate family can tell."

The Seidmans, who own and operate A Child's World Development Centers Inc., know all too well the benefits mental health can provide to physical health.

While Talia was receiving radiation treatments in Boston, she was participating with her kindergarten classmates in their Odyssey of the Mind challenge through a videotape exchange. She helped them come up with

the solution to "What is your dream vacation?": a trip to outer space. She also received daily tutoring and nurtured her intellectual curiosity as long as she could.

"Doctors were amazed how she was able to keep going after the surgeries," Ron Seidman said. "They said they had never seen so much tumor in a person who was still living, and they attributed the remarkable resilience to the fact that her brain was continually stimulated. The brain that was left was still compensating. She just ran out of brain."

"We know the body and mind are connected," he said. "You could have the greatest medical treat-

ment in the world, but if it's not doing anything to ensure the quality of life and mental, emotional stability, then it is not going to be as good a treatment as it could be."

He argues that the technology is economically advantageous, too. Instead of paying a teacher to go to the student's home for one hour a day, videoconferencing equipment can be purchased for a one-time cost of about \$15,000. Over the long term, Ron Seidman said, that will cost less than repeated teacher visits. Seidman said he has approached districts, including Methuon, about purchasing the equipment for their chronically ill students.

The Seidmans also have submitted an application to open a charter school that would incorporate videoconferencing. Their Elan Charter School plan has twice been rebuffed by the Pennsbury School District over application inconsistencies and other concerns. They plan to take their case to the State Charter Appeals Board.

Nationwide, videoconferencing in education is catching on.

"It's just been an explosive growth in terms of installing videoconferencing equipment in the last 10 years," said Galen Godbey, executive director of Bethlehem-based Community of Agile Partners in Education, a consortium of mostly educational institutions.

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