

# Bellingham mom turns grief into lifesaving nonprofit, ‘he changed my life’

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By Travis Mayfield

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BELLINGHAM, Wash. — Bellingham is a remarkable place filled with remarkable people doing remarkable things.

Jennifer Schouten is one of those people.

She is a mom there who has faced her darkest hour and chosen to light her world in response.

Jennifer is the woman behind a major medical supply recycling clearing house in Bellingham called Dominic’s Closet.

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In 2 years since she began her nonprofit it has provided lifesaving medical supplies — for free — to families in 19 different states and 10 different countries.



So why does she do it?

To understand that, first you need to meet her son Dominic.

The story behind Dominic’s Closet

“So many organs of his body were affected by prematurity, brain, lung, gastrointestinal, kidneys,” said Jennifer.

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Dominic was supposed to die at birth. Instead he lived for 14 years.



“He really was a joyful boy, his laugh was pretty contagious,” said Jennifer.

“He loved music and at the end of the song he would kind of go...du, du, du, du, duh – ding”

Maybe he loved music because he couldn’t really speak or because he spent so much time in a hospital.

Maybe he loved music for the same reason everyone loves music, because it’s beautiful like he was.

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"I thought that when he died I would feel relief, I thought that I would be comforted by the fact that he didn't have pain anymore," said Jennifer. "But then I quickly realized I missed him."

When your child dies, what do you do? How do you go on?

"It didn't make sense to just do dishes and clean the house," said Jennifer.

When the son you've devoted everything to is gone, how do you keep living?

"I didn't know my meaning," said Jennifer.

Then came that first Facebook post:

"Could anyone use some of Dominic's unused medical supplies?"

YES!

Then another post:

"Can anyone use a lycra vest and someone reached out to me from an autism center," said Jennifer.

Suddenly it was a thing.

"People started calling me saying I have a friend who needs," said Jennifer.

What did Jennifer do?

"I said, well let me go look in Dominic's closet – and that happened a few times...and then it came to me...Dominic's Closet and I thought, that's what I can do."

And she did it.

"We've become like this medical supply recycling clearing house," said Jennifer.

The supplies now fill rooms, hallways, table tops and even the garage of the family home.

Jennifer's daughter Ava and husband Craig help too.

"There's no questions asked," said Jennifer. "If somebody needs something we send it."

They use one email address, one Facebook page and it's all in one boy's name.

"He changed my life," said Jennifer.

A life that may be over in one sense, but just beginning in another.

“Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path...and leave a trail,” reads Jennifer from the leather band she now wears around her wrist in her son’s memory.

If you have a medical supply need or you would like to donate unused medical supplies, or money, just search Dominic’s Closet on Facebook.

You’ll recognize the logo immediately it’s a cartoon drawing of Dominic and his little sister Ava.