

# Carrier donates kidney to local toddler

**W**hen she was invited to join a Facebook group called “A kidney for Luna” in early April 2025, **Amber Fandrey** quickly accepted.

Luna, then 2, was born with congenital nephrotic syndrome, a rare and severe kidney disorder, and was in end stage kidney failure due to excessive protein leakage. She was on a feeding tube and underwent hours of daily dialysis, and a kidney transplant was her only hope for a cure. When the family wasn’t an option for donation, the toddler’s grandmother started the Facebook group for a wider reach.

Fandrey, an Ann Arbor, MI Branch 434 member who began delivering mail in 2022, felt for the toddler when she saw the appeal for a donor online. “I’ve always been kind of passionate about organ donation, more so like donating organs like once you pass away. I didn’t really ever think about that you could be a living donor,” she said.

“But then my fiancé did it about a little over three years ago. ... He donated his kidney to a random person,” she added. “So, I thought that was pretty inspirational to see him go through it, and I thought, like, ‘Maybe one day I will—we’ll see.’ And then I came across Luna. It was almost like a sign to me, because I saw her page so many times.”

And so, Fandrey, 30, applied to be a donor by filling out a Living Donor Program interest form, thinking she’d never hear anything. “And then they called me literally the next morning after I signed up,” she said. “So that’s kind of how the process started.”

She soon made an appointment at Henry Ford Hospital in downtown Detroit, MI. “It was just a full day of testing, like six to eight hours I was at the hospital,” Fandrey said. Tests ran

the gamut—it included blood work, a kidney function test and a CT scan, and then she underwent a psychological evaluation and met with a dietitian.

Fandrey went back a few times over the course of April and May for extra testing. “They found out that one of my kidneys was smaller than the other and one was bigger, so then I had to get the split kidney test to make sure they were both operating,” she said. “They can only be a certain percentage difference in operation from each other to make sure I’m going to be OK once I only have one, and that the one that I give her is going to be strong enough and functional enough.”

She continued: “They usually take the left one from people. I guess it’s easier to put into the recipient’s body. But they had to take my right one because of my function. So, they didn’t tell me ‘yes’ right away. They kind of were trying to figure out if that’s what they wanted to do, because the right one is more complicated to ... connect into the recipient.”

Fandrey worried while she waited for news. “I was kind of like, ‘Oh man, that sucks,’ you know,” she said. “After all the testing and everything, I was really wanting to do it. I felt pretty passionate about it at that point.”

The medical team told her they were evaluating another candidate but that they’d let her know soon, and she heard back a few weeks later that she was the better match.

“I remember I was driving when they called, but I had the phone number saved, so I pulled over and I, like, started crying as soon as I got off the phone, because I was just, like, excited and I really wanted to do it,” Fandrey said.

The family had posted updates on their Facebook group throughout the

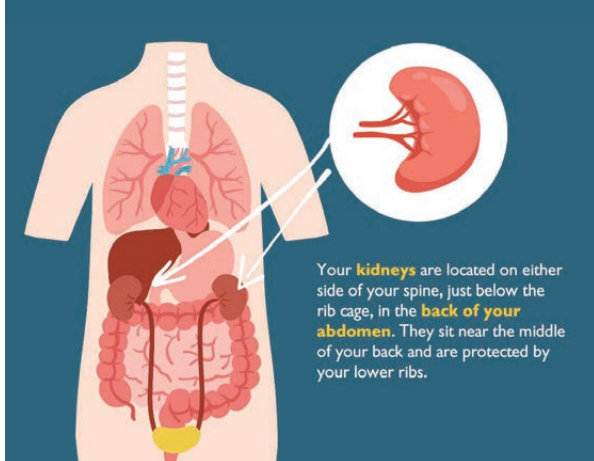
process about how a donor was chosen but they didn’t know who it was. “They posted, like, ‘I understand if you don’t want to tell us, but we would love to know one day,’” Fandrey said. “So, it was really hard to keep watching them post that and know it was me. But I was nervous. I wanted to make sure everything went smoothly.”

The carrier waited until her pre-op appointment the week before surgery before reaching out to Luna’s grandma, who runs the “A kidney for Luna” group. “I sent her a long message, and I let her know it was me and that I felt really grateful to be her donor,” Fandrey said.

Once Luna was stable after experiencing some medical issues, the surgeries were scheduled for July 16, and Fandrey reported to Henry Ford Hospital for her part of the procedure. “They took my kidney and they took it for a ride,” she said, taking her organ 3 miles across town and delivering it to Detroit Medical Center’s Children’s Hospital of Michigan, where Luna was waiting. Amber’s kidney began functioning immediately inside of the toddler.

The carrier’s mom and fiancé were able to communicate with Luna’s family during the transplant to provide updates while at the hospital.

“I’ve never had a major surgery. I’ve never had a child, so it was my first time ever being put under besides wisdom teeth [removal]. So, I was pretty nervous, and I’m giving a whole organ. But I think the excitement outweighed my nerves,” Fandrey said. “When I woke up, I remember I was just very happy, because they updated me and let me know that she was also in the midst of waking up and the surgery went well. They showed me a picture



Your **kidneys** are located on either side of your spine, just below the rib cage, in the **back of your abdomen**. They sit near the middle of your back and are protected by your lower ribs.

**Left: The kidneys are part of the urinary tract system, filtering the blood and removing the waste.**

**Below: Fandrey (l) with Luna and Dr. Rohini Prashar, Fandrey's nephrologist and the medical director of Henry Ford's kidney transplant program**

of my kidney ... before they passed it to her, and that was really cool. ... It was a really good day."

Fandrey spent two nights in the hospital before heading home and took five weeks off work for recovery, most of which time was covered by the Postal Service under a program for organ donation.

"The recovery was actually better than I thought it would be. The first three to four days is rough, as expected. I was in some pain, but I just slept a lot and took it easy," she said, adding that she had to get up slowly and had some pain around the incision area. "And then I would say after the first week, I was surprisingly doing really well. Like, I remember I kept having my friends and family check in on me, like, 'Hi, how are you doing?' At the two-week mark ... I was like, 'I'm doing really good. I don't really have much else to say to you. ... I'm kind of bored at home, to be honest.'"

Fandrey is expected to lead a normal life with one kidney. She's been advised to increase her water intake to around 80 ounces daily and has a few minor dietary restrictions. "My way of living hasn't changed much," she said. "Everything is very back to normal."

"Altruistic donation—giving an organ to a stranger—is extremely rare but an extraordinary act of giving," Dr. Ahmed Nassar, the transplant surgeon who placed Amber's kidney into Luna's body, told Henry Ford Health. "Luna's family and the transplant teams are extremely honored to celebrate and thankful of Amber for her life-saving gift."

And Luna's life has greatly improved. After a long hospital stay, her life has a happy new normal.



Dr. Rohini Prashar, medical director of the kidney transplant program at the Henry Ford Transplant Institute, told CBS news, "She's going to get to play, celebrate birthdays, celebrate holidays, so it's an incredible gift."

The carrier keeps up with Luna and her family on occasion through texts and phone calls, and they've met in person twice since the transplant, first at a Labor Day barbecue that Luna's family hosted, and the second in December in front of local media.

Fandrey isn't the type to seek attention, so she tried to keep her involvement as quiet as possible for as long as possible, only telling her family, close friends and a couple of co-workers beforehand. After meeting Luna, she agreed to let the toddler's family share that she was the altruistic donor.

"The next day I had, like, the newspaper calling me, and it blew up," Fandrey said. "She lives in Westland and I used to live in Westland, and there's a Westland community page that has a ton of followers, and they posted about it and it went huge, and I was not expecting it at all. It was kind of a lot to take in, but everybody was obviously super positive about it. ... Then I came back to work and people

were like, 'What the heck? You didn't tell us! We saw you on Facebook, we saw you on the news.'"

Branch 434 President **John Odegard** called Fandrey an "outstanding young lady" who has "a servant's heart and a giving heart," adding, "She deserves all the accolades."

Despite feeling weird about the attention, Fandrey is glad to bring a spotlight to organ donation and to encourage people to consider applying.

"I mean, I saw my fiancé do it and he had a good experience. He's very healthy. He runs ultra runs, 100-milers, 200-milers, and he's doing just fine. And I did it and I'm healthy. I live my life completely normal," she said. "And now I get to watch Luna grow up as a healthy baby. She had to do dialysis for eight hours every night and whatnot, and she couldn't eat, she couldn't use the bathroom, and now she can do all those things."

"There's so many people waiting for a kidney on the list, it's insane," she said. "[A]nd it's so easy just to change someone's life completely.

"It's just very, very worth it," she added. "Probably one of the best things I will do in my whole life. So, I would love to see more people do it." **PR**