On February 7th and 8th, more than two thousand students at the University of Iowa gathered in the Iowa Memorial Union Ballroom for one common purpose: to dance. This year marked Dance Marathon’s twentieth anniversary at the University of Iowa and the event was more successful and humbling than anyone could have predicted. The idea of going 24 hours without sitting, sleeping, or consuming caffeine can be quite daunting; but when the children supported by Dance Marathon efforts, shared their testimonials of how Dance Marathon has impacted their lives, the sacrifice of not having Mountain Dew for a few hours seemed minuscule in comparison. Dance Marathon is a year long fundraiser that raises money for research for pediatric cancer. Several Communication Studies Majors participated in this wonderful event and I was fortunate enough to hear one woman’s powerful story.

Dance Marathon is not specific to the University of Iowa, but it has been more successful at this University than any other in the state of Iowa. Additionally, it is the second most successful in the country behind Penn State. This year, the students raised $1,801,032.20 to support pediatric cancer research, nearly $300,000 more than last year. Each person that participates in Dance Marathon is required to raise a minimum of $400 to attend the Big Event, which is the 24-hour dance event in the IMU Ballroom. To put into perspective how passionate the students at Iowa are about raising money for this wonderful cause, consider this: If every student that participated only raised the required $400, only $800,000 would have been raised. The Morale Captains alone, who are the team leaders for this event, raised $127,000. Several Mini-Dance Marathons were throughout the year by schools in the Iowa City area; these events raised over $150,000.
Students at this University, and particularly some students in the Communication Studies field, have a fierce and sincere passion when it comes to helping children at the UI Hospital with pediatric cancer, and go above and beyond what is asked in order to make a difference in these children’s lives. One of the Communication Studies students, Paige Gwiasda, was kind enough to share her personal story of how Dance Marathon has had an impact on her life. Paige was an Assistant Morale Captain this year and helped to lead a team of 65 dancers raise nearly $55,000, shattering the previous team raising record of $44,316.30. This also made her team the highest fundraising group in the twenty years of Dance Marathon history. Paige said that although this was an incredible honor, what made it even better was knowing that all of the money that they raised was for the kids.

Paige gives all the credit to the kids saying: “They are why we do all that we do, they are our motivation. If it weren’t for them I wouldn’t have had the drive to do half the stuff I have done such as train for the Chicago Marathon last October. The kiddos are our heroes.” Paige, a senior who will be graduating this May, said that her involvement this past year with Dance Marathon was the best possible way to make her senior year memorable.

Paige’s story is incredibly touching, and many other students have had equally rewarding experiences with Dance Marathon. During the duration of the 24 hour Big Event, there are multiple opportunities for students to hear families stories about how their children’s lives have been changed by Dance Marathon as well as how the organization has lifted the spirits of the parents and family members. The vast majority of the money that is raised by Dance Marathon goes to research for pediatric cancer, but a
portion of it also goes to helping the families by paying for parking at the hospital, toys for the children, and various other luxuries such as going out to dinner that unfortunately cannot be experienced by these families at this time in their lives. It is not uncommon for Communication Studies major’s to pursue a career in fundraising and philanthropic events, which would explain the enthusiasm toward this wonderful cause.

Cancer is unfortunately a vicious monster and sometimes takes kiddos away from their families and the people that love them. One of the most touching aspects of Dance Marathon is a candle that is placed in the back of the IMU Ballroom and continuously burns throughout the 24-hour event in memory of the kids that are dancing forever in our hearts. No one knows how soon the cure for cancer will be found, but as one of Dance Marathon’s mottos goes: “When cancer is cured we’ll dance for joy, until then we’ll dance for life.”

Paige (right) along with her other Assistant Morale captain, Natalie Paul (left) and Morale Captain, Caitlan Ledin (center) pose for a picture during the Big Event.
about Dance Marathon at the University of Iowa, visit http://dancemarathon.uiowa.edu,
and make sure to check out the Communication Studies Department Facebook page at
https://www.facebook.com/IowaCommStudies and be on the lookout for our Twitter
account which will be up and running soon!