



700 KIDS SHOW THEY CARE

ANGELA POWNALL

The oval of young Regan Smolic's school was turned into a heart-shaped sea of red yesterday to support the 12-year-old who has been battling cancer for eight years.

Almost 700 pupils at St Peter's Primary School in Inglewood dressed in red for Regan, and to raise money for Telethon.

Regan wanted to be there but had to watch the spectacle from his bed at Perth Children's Hospital where he has been bedridden for the past three months.

He smiled as he watched a video of his classmates yelling "Regan", instead of 'cheese' for the camera.

"It's pretty cool, and very nice of them," he said.

Regan was just four when he became unwell in September

2011 with headaches and vomiting, and began losing weight.

His parents Amanda and Daniel took him to see doctors, who repeatedly dismissed suggestions he had a brain tumour.

About five months later, Regan collapsed and was taken to hospital where he had emergency surgery to remove a brain tumour.

He was diagnosed with pilocytic astrocytoma, which has seen rare and slow-growing tumours grow and spread extensively in his brain and spine.

Regan has had 22 operations during his short life — nine over the past three months alone.

An operation to remove a tumour caused nerve damage in his brain stem, leaving him unable to swallow. He has been fed through a tube for seven

years. Mrs Smolic said Regan coped remarkably well with being unable to eat.

"I really struggled with it in the beginning but now I'm grateful that he's still fighting. You've just got to move on," she said.

Regan's latest stint in hospital has been to deal with crippling headaches caused by a blocked shunt, which is implanted into his brain to drain excess fluid.

Surgery to unblock the shunt has been unsuccessful because it has caused dangerous bleeding on his brain.

Regan now has an external drain fitted into his brain to relieve low pressure fluid. But he has to lie in bed at a certain angle for the drain to function and is not allowed to stand up or walk around.

Regan's mother, Amanda

Smolic, said her son's battle with cancer had been long and hard, especially the last three months.

"It's been ongoing. He's generally pretty good but he's getting down at the moment. He's stuck in bed and been in a lot of pain," she said.

"I missed all of last term at school. I went to school for four days," Regan said sadly.

Regan's family and friends have made sure he has never been alone during his long hospital day.

A highlight for the young Dockers fan was a visit from Fremantle captain Nathan Fyfe last month. He smiled at the memory of his footy hero's visit.

Regan was definite that sport was his favourite activity at school, followed by maths and art. He wants to be a police

officer when he leaves school.

"I'm pretty interested in it. I've been to the police station," he said.

Despite his illness, Regan has sought to help others like him. He has organised pirate dress-up days at his school to raise money for cancer research.

"It's just fun," he said.

Mrs Smolic said Regan had told her "he doesn't want anyone else to go through what he's going through".

St Peter's principal, Pina Hutcherson, said the dress-in-red day was a show of support for Regan, and for Telethon.

A teacher decorated Regan's hospital room with red streamers and balloons in time for yesterday so Regan could be part of the fun.

"It looks like the community is getting behind it to raise mo-

rale for Regan and trying to raise a good amount for kids in need," he said.

"Regan loves coming to school. In a message to his mates, he told them to never moan about school and homework because he would give anything to be there."

Regan urged people to support Telethon next weekend.

"It's important that people can donate so we can find cures for diseases," he said.



Where and when to see Telethon

We're painting the town red. So come dressed in your best red and join the Telethon live audience in the Riverside Theatre at the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Tickets are available for the opening show on Saturday, October 26 between 6.30-9pm and the closing show on Sunday 6.30-8.30pm.

Go to premier.ticketek.com.au to buy tickets. Entry to watch the show at any other time during the Telethon Weekend is by gold coin donation. Children aged two and under can sit on their parents lap.