# LEGACY AND FAMILY IMPACT

*Donation can become part of a person's legacy without defining their entire life or removing the pain of losing them. This guide explains tissue donation's possible impact, offers questions for donor families, and explores remembrance, support, correspondence, and sharing a story on your own terms.*

## Begin with the person

A donor was a person before they were a donor: someone with relationships, interests, habits, work, hopes, and a place in a family. Remembering those things can help keep a tribute grounded in who they were. A story does not need a dramatic outcome or a recipient count to be worth sharing.

Some families find meaning in donation. Others have mixed feelings or need time before thinking about it. Family members can feel differently from one another. A person can appreciate the possibility of helping others while still feeling grief, anger, uncertainty, or exhaustion. There is no obligation to describe a loss as positive.

## The foundation of Because of One

Erica Barlament created Because of One to honor her father, Eric, and his legacy as a tissue donor. Eric died in a car accident in 2003. Her mother, Kari, honored the donation wishes he had shared with his family. Erica grew up learning about him and carrying his story into donation awareness work.

His historical Donate Life Rose Parade tribute identifies him as a tissue donor. That distinction matters: a general organ-donation statistic should never be used as if it were his personal outcome. His legacy includes the life he lived and the influence his decision had on his family, even without a public recipient total.

## A reflection to begin

If you want to remember someone, start with a small prompt: "What is one thing I want people to know about this person?" The answer may have nothing to do with donation. You can decide later whether, how, or when to add that part of the story.

*Read more:* Eric Barlament original tribute | UW OTD donor families | Versiti donor family resources

## What tissue donation can help make possible

Tissue donation may support treatment and reconstruction in ways people do not immediately associate with transplantation. Donated skin can help in serious burn care; bone can support reconstruction; tendons or ligaments can help repair certain injuries; valves and blood vessels may be useful in particular procedures. Corneas can help treat some forms of corneal vision loss.

Each use depends on the tissue's suitability and the recipient's needs. It is not accurate to promise that every donated tissue will be transplanted, used for a particular condition, or associated with a specific result. Donation professionals can explain what information is available about an individual gift.

## Why tissue donation differs from organ donation

The eligibility, recovery, preparation, and timing can differ. Some people unable to donate solid organs may still be considered for tissue or eye donation. Some tissues can be processed and stored before use, so the path from donation to a recipient may differ from an urgent organ transplant.

## Questions about a loved one's donation

- Which organization coordinated each part of the donation?
- What donation authorization was documented?
- Which gifts were recovered, and what information can be shared about their use?
- Will updates be available, and when would it be reasonable to ask?
- Who should we contact if a new question comes up months or years later?
- Are there separate contacts for organ, tissue, and eye donation?

## Understanding an incomplete answer

Not every organization can provide the same level of recipient information. Timing, the type of donation, the use of the gift, and privacy requirements can affect what is shared. A lack of a personal story or a precise count should not be interpreted as proof of a particular outcome. Ask the organization to distinguish confirmed facts from possibilities or information it cannot release.

## Potential impact is not a personal tally

A statistic about what one donor can make possible is an educational estimate, not a certificate of what happened for a particular family. Describe confirmed outcomes only when the responsible organization has provided them and the family is comfortable sharing.

*Read more:* Donate Life America tissue donation | Donate Life America cornea donation | HRSA what can be donated

# Support after donation

The recovery organization's donor family or aftercare team is often a useful first contact. UW Organ and Tissue Donation describes continuing family support and facilitated communication. Versiti offers aftercare information, loss resources, recognition materials, and links to educational handouts. Ask the relevant program what support applies to your family.

### Ask for the kind of help you need

- ➔ You might want an explanation of the medical process, a remembrance opportunity, help with a letter, or a referral for grief support. Naming the need can make the conversation easier. You do not need to prepare a public story or become an advocate to receive appropriate support.

# Everyday care while grieving

Keep expectations manageable. Consider which ordinary tasks you need help with, such as meals, transportation, appointments, or communication. A trusted person can help track questions or take notes when a professional explains something difficult. You can revisit information later if it is hard to absorb the first time.

Grief does not follow a uniform timetable. If you want more support, ask your primary care professional, a grief counselor, a social worker, a trusted faith leader, or the donor family team about appropriate options. An educational guide is not a substitute for individualized care.

# Supporting children

Use direct, age-appropriate language and allow questions to return over time. Help a child distinguish death from sleep and separate the person's death from the later donation decision. Avoid telling a child that the person died because someone needed an organ. Ask the care team or a child-focused grief professional for help explaining unfamiliar medical terms.

Children may want concrete answers about what happened, reassurance about who is caring for them, or permission to remember in their own way. A family does not need to tell every clinical detail at once. Versiti's child-grief handout offers further reading.

# Questions for a support team

Ask about available services, how to contact the team, whether other family members can participate, any costs or eligibility limits, and referrals if you need help beyond the program's scope. Ask about support in a language or format that works for your family.

*Read more:* UW OTD donor families | Versiti donor family resources | Versiti caring for yourself while grieving | Versiti children and grief

# Correspondence with recipients

Some donor families and recipients choose to communicate through an organization that facilitates contact. UW OTD explains its correspondence process, and Versiti provides writing guidance. Start with the organization connected to the donation rather than trying to identify recipients independently.

### Before writing

- ➔ Ask what the organization can facilitate, which identifying details should be omitted, whether photographs are permitted, and how the letter will be reviewed or forwarded. Rules can differ between organ and tissue programs. A program's process should guide the next step.

### A simple letter structure

- ➔ Introduce your relationship to the donor. Share something you want the recipient to know about the person, such as a hobby, a value, or a memory. Say only what feels comfortable about donation. You may close with a kind wish without requesting an update or reply.

### Make room for different responses

- ➔ A recipient may not be ready to write, may need time, or may choose not to respond. A donor family may feel the same way. Correspondence and direct contact are personal choices. A lack of a reply does not tell you what the gift meant to someone.

### Considering direct contact

- ➔ Ask the facilitating organization about its consent and privacy process. Do not assume that a letter authorizes exchanging names, contact details, or meeting in person. Think about expectations in advance and how you would feel about different kinds of contact or no contact.

# Remembrance on your terms

Possibilities include a private letter, a photo collection, a family meal, an activity the person enjoyed, a remembrance event, or a donation-related tribute. These are options rather than expectations. A small private act can be as meaningful as a public ceremony.

# Questions for reflection

What do I want to preserve? What am I ready to share? Which details belong only to our family? What would I hope for from correspondence, and can I allow the other person to choose their response? You can change your answers as your needs change.

*Read more:* UW OTD correspondence | Versiti writing to organ recipients | Versiti donor family resources

# Share a story thoughtfully

A donation story should belong to the person or family sharing it. Decide what you want readers to understand before selecting images or writing a headline. Explain the life and relationships involved, and include donation as accurately as the available information allows.

### Plan the boundaries first

- ➔ Choose the name or level of anonymity you want, which photographs may be used, whether dates and medical details are included, and where the story may appear. Get permission from other identifiable people. Consider whether children's details need to be omitted or handled differently.

### Separate submission from publication

- ➔ Sending a story for consideration should not be treated as blanket permission for publication. Ask who will edit it, whether you can review the final version, which channels are proposed, and whom to contact about later concerns. If you share with Because of One, the submission process should make that approval step clear.

### Keep the facts accurate

- ➔ Identify the kind of donation correctly. Avoid invented recipient details, quotations, personal memories, or totals. Describe uncertain information as uncertain. A meaningful story does not require a guaranteed outcome, and another family's experience should not be presented as if it happened to yours.

### A useful story outline

1. Who the person is or was, beyond donation.
2. Your relationship and the experience you choose to share.
3. What is known about the donation decision or transplant.
4. What this has meant to you, in your own words.
5. What you hope a reader understands or feels free to ask.

# Resources for families and storytellers

*Read more:* UW OTD donor families | Versiti donor family resources | UW OTD correspondence | Versiti writing to organ recipients | Versiti caring for yourself while grieving | Versiti children and grief | Donate Life America stories | HRSA life stories | Eric Barlament original tribute

# Your next step

Choose whichever action fits now: ask one unanswered question, seek support, preserve a private memory, explore a letter, or take no public action. Donation can be part of a legacy without creating an obligation to advocate or explain your grief to anyone.

Reviewed October 21, 2026. External organizations have their own programs and requirements; links do not imply affiliation. General education does not replace individual medical guidance.

*One donor. Countless lives.*