

Donor gives lad second chance

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By Clare Masters, Health Reporter

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YOUNG Harrison Christofis was battling a rare blood disorder when a mercy dash overseas found him a bone marrow donor who gave him a chance to have a normal childhood.

Harrison was one of the few children in Australia to be born with the genetic defect Wiskott Aldridge syndrome.

His hopes rested on a donor transplant, which would give the Mudgee two-year-old an 80 per cent chance of survival.



Recovering ... Harrison Christofis, 2, and his mother Leah

Without the transplant, patients are unlikely to live past their fifth birthday.

The chance of finding matching bone marrow with any unrelated person is about one in a million, according to Dr Peter Shaw, of The Children's Hospital at Westmead.

Unfortunately, none of Harrison's four siblings were a match, and when the Australian donor registry did not yield any possibilities the hospital was forced to look overseas.

Harrison's mother Leah Christofis said she burst into tears when they received the phone call saying a donor had been found in Canada.

For ten days Harrison endured chemotherapy that wiped his out his immune system, preparing his body for an injection of cells that would give him a second chance. But the mercy dash ran into trouble when the plane returning the cells to Sydney was diverted to Brisbane because of fog.

Clinical nurse consultant Katherine Stephen travelled to Canada to collect the cells and sat awake for 48 hours guarding the Esky on her lap.

"Being diverted meant the temperature of the pack started to go up. Dry ice was bought to me on board the plane and then we were fast tracked and finally arrived back in Sydney."

Harrison received the cells and three weeks later doctors believe he should live the same healthy life as his siblings.