

Every Family Deserves A Fighting Chance

An Interview with Anthony Rizzo, Founder, Anthony Rizzo Family Foundation



Anthony Rizzo hosting Rocco DiMaggio in the Yankees dugout before a game

EDITORS' NOTE Anthony Rizzo was a sixth-round draft pick out of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, by the Boston Red Sox. He spent 14 years playing Major League Baseball for the San Diego Padres, Chicago Cubs, and New York Yankees. Rizzo is a three-time All-Star, four-time Gold Glove Recipient and a Platinum Glove Recipient, Silver Slugger and World Series Champion. In 2017, Rizzo was named as the Roberto Clemente Award recipient, an award given to the player who best exemplifies the game of baseball, sportsmanship, community involvement and the individual's contribution to the team. In 2012, he founded the Anthony Rizzo Family Foundation. The Foundation has donated more than \$11 million since its inception.

FOUNDATION BRIEF The Anthony Rizzo Family Foundation (rizzo44.com) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization founded by Anthony Rizzo who realized during his own battle with cancer that no matter how difficult fighting cancer was for him, it was even more difficult for his family. Rizzo believes that an individual does not battle cancer alone, but that the whole family battles it together. The mission of the Anthony Rizzo Family Foundation is to raise money for cancer research

and to provide support to children and their families battling the disease. The Anthony Rizzo Family Foundation believes that every family deserves a fighting chance.

What inspired you and your family to create the Anthony Rizzo Family Foundation?

I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma when I was 18 years old, and that experience changed my life forever. I was blessed to have incredible doctors, the support of my family, and access to the care I needed. But I also saw firsthand how overwhelming a cancer diagnosis can be for families emotionally and financially. My family was extremely lucky that the Red Sox picked up all of my medical bills – not every family has that. Right there my mom and I

promised each other that when I made it to the Big Leagues we would help these families. The Foundation is my way of stepping up for kids and families who are in the fight because I've been in that fight too.

How do you define the Anthony Rizzo Family Foundation's mission?

When I was going through my battle with cancer, I quickly realized that as hard as it was on me physically, it was harder on my family. Cancer doesn't just impact one person. It impacts everyone who loves you. That's why the mission of the Anthony Rizzo Family Foundation means so much to me. We're here to provide direct financial and emotional support to children and their families who are battling cancer. I've lived it. I've seen the stress, the uncertainty, and the weight families



Anthony Rizzo greets Elijah Sepich before a Chicago Cubs game



Emily Rizzo, Anthony Rizzo, Laurie Rizzo and John Rizzo at the naming dedication of the Anthony Rizzo Family Foundation waiting room at Lurie Children's Hospital in Chicago (above); Anthony Rizzo hosts Jimmy O'Neill and family before the Yankees game (right)

carry during treatment. At the end of the day, we believe every family deserves a fighting chance. If we can help ease even a small part of that burden, then we're doing exactly what we set out to do.

How has the Foundation evolved since its founding?

Over the years, it's grown into something much bigger than I ever imagined. We've expanded our reach to across the United States, increased the number of families we directly support to more than 500 families a year, and built endowments

with hospitals that will support families not just financially but emotionally as well for the rest of time. What started as an idea in a hospital room with my mom, just a small way to give back, has turned into a year-round commitment to making a real, lasting impact.

How do you measure the Foundation's success beyond dollars raised?

We measure success by the families we're able to stand beside. It's the text from a parent saying they can finally breathe because the eviction

notices have stopped. It's seeing a kid smile in the middle of treatment because we brought in a fun activity or they came to one of our Rizzo Series events. It's hearing that the financial stress has eased just enough for a family to focus on what really matters.

Success is also long-term. It's knowing we're helping fund research that moves the needle forward in pediatric cancer. It's building real relationships with hospitals, creating endowments, and building communities. It's showing up consistently, year after year.

If families feel supported, less alone, and more hopeful because of what we do, then the Foundation is succeeding.



Anthony Rizzo draws pictures with a patient during a hospital visit in Peoria, Illinois

What role do partnerships play in expanding the Foundation's reach?

The right partners help us expand our reach, connect with more families, and raise the resources needed to make a real impact. It turns one event or one initiative into something bigger and more sustainable. At the end of the day, having the right people and organizations in our corner means we can help more families, back more research, and keep growing this thing the right way, and that's what it's all about for me.

What legacy do you want the Foundation to leave for the families it serves?

I want the legacy of the Foundation to be hope. I want these families to know they aren't alone. If years from now families say, "They showed up for us when we needed it most" then we accomplished our goals.

How did your experience battling cancer at a young age influence your outlook on life?

It gave me a new perspective. I stopped taking the little things for granted – my health, my family, just being able to step on a baseball field. It also taught me resilience – you realize you're capable of more than you thought. That mindset carried over into my career – the ups and downs, the pressure – it's all about perspective. ●