

# Donor Families Requesting Recipient Information

Many donor families ask whether they can have contact with their loved one's recipients. Some wonder how their loved one's organ recipients are doing months and years after the transplant, or wish they knew how many people were helped with their loved one's tissue, such as bone and skin.

If your loved one donated [tissue](#), such as corneas, heart valves, veins, skin and/or bone, we can request a tissue update if it has been over a year since your loved one's donation.

If your loved one donated [organs](#), such as kidneys, pancreas, liver, lungs or heart, we can request a medical update on the recipient and provide information on the letter writing process, should you wish to initiate contact.

## TISSUE

Within the first few weeks of your loved one's donation, you will receive a letter providing information on what tissue was recovered for transplant and how that tissue may be utilized.

Due to tissue regulations and the lengthy quality assurance process, it will take some time before the tissue is able to be used for transplant and/or medical research. Many things can happen along the way (testing, medical record review, evaluation of the tissue) that may deem the tissue not suitable for transplant. Requesting a [tissue update](#) can be requested 12 months after donation.

Due to complexities involved with transplantation of donated tissue, we are unable to forward correspondence from donor families to tissue recipients. **However**, if we receive correspondence from your loved one's tissue recipient, we will contact you and see if you would like to receive this type of correspondence. At that time, it may be possible for you to write back to the tissue recipient that sent you correspondence if the recipient has provided their name and address.

## How does the gift of tissue help recipients?

Tissue donation is a gift of immeasurable value, as there are many thousands of people waiting for a tissue transplant that will enable them to return to a normal life. Here are some common uses for donated tissue:

- Bone and ligament tissue may restore quality of life to those who may have suffered traumatic injuries, joint injuries, cancerous tumors, back injuries, or degenerative disease.
- Cornea and posterior pole tissues can give sight to one or two people who have been devastated by the loss of sight; the gift of restored vision is miraculous.
- Whole heart or heart valve tissues may help up to two people who may have suffered from heart disease or children born with birth defects.
- Pericardium (the layer of tissue around the heart) tissue can repair a patient's shoulder or help with cardiac/heart surgeries or breast reconstruction.
- Vein tissues may be used to replace blocked arteries in heart-bypass surgery or in peripheral vascular reconstruction surgery where a bypass is required or to help save a patient's limb.
- Skin tissue can be used for breast reconstruction, to fill soft tissue loss from cancer or trauma, to repair hernia injuries, to restore bladder control in the treatment of incontinence, and in periodontal surgery to correct gingival defects.

## Tissue Recipient Update

***Before you request an update, we suggest you consider the following:*** The majority of times, we are able to provide families with positive information on their loved one's donation. However, there is the possibility that due to medical conditions of the donated tissue, transplantation could not occur. Some donor families are just happy knowing they did what they could to help and don't want to deal with potential bad news, and in this case, aren't ready to request an update. Other people just want to know either way.

**When tissue is utilized for transplant, tissue trace cards are sent back to the processor and when we request an update, the processor informs us of the number of surgeries performed to date with your loved one's donated tissue. Sometimes the processors can provide information such as the recipient's gender, age, state where the surgery took place, or type of surgery performed.**

**If you are ready to proceed with requesting an update, email [Kgossett@lifechoiceopo.org](mailto:Kgossett@lifechoiceopo.org) or call 800-874-5215.** Please indicate you'd like to receive a recipient update and include your loved one's full name and date of birth, and your full name and phone number. You must be the legal next of kin, or have permission from the legal next of kin on record, to request an update.

## Organ Recipient Update

Within the first month of your loved one's organ donation, you will receive a letter providing you with information about what organs were able to be transplanted.

Families often wonder how the recipients are doing months or years later. Upon your request for a recipient update, we can ask the transplant centers how each recipient is doing and relay this information back to you.

Choosing to write to your loved one's organ recipient is a very personal decision. The right time to write is whenever you feel ready. The confidentiality of donor families and transplant recipients is protected at all times. All identities are kept confidential and anonymous unless both parties have agreed to disclose their identities to each other.

***Before you request an update, we suggest you consider the following:*** The majority of times, we are able to provide families with positive information on their loved one's donation. However there is the possibility that due to many circumstances, the news may not be positive. Some donor families are just happy knowing they did what they could to help and don't want to deal with potential bad news, and perhaps aren't ready to request an update. Other donor families just want to know either way.

**If you are ready to proceed with requesting an update, email [Kgossett@lifechoiceopo.org](mailto:Kgossett@lifechoiceopo.org) or call 800-874-5215.** Please indicate you'd like to receive a medical update and include your donor's full name and date of birth, and your full name and phone number. You must be the legal next of kin on record to request an update.

## Writing to recipients

If you choose to write to your loved one's organ recipient, here is some information to guide your process:

- Write information you feel comfortable sharing about you, your loved one and other family members. This may include occupation, hobbies or interests.
- You may want to write about how your decision to donate has impacted you and your family.
- You may include the first names of yourself, your loved one and other family members, the state in which you live, and photographs.
- You may feel more comfortable sending a card during the holidays, or a "Thinking of You" card, if you choose not to write a long letter.

## Mailing your letter or card

- Place the letter or card in an unsealed envelope.
  - Include a separate sheet of paper with your full name and the name and date of death of your loved one.
  - Mail your letter to Attn: Donor Family Services, LifeChoice Donor Services, 340 West Newberry Road, Suite A, Bloomfield, CT 06002
- #####➔ You may also email your letter to [Kgossett@lifechoiceopo.org](mailto:Kgossett@lifechoiceopo.org).

## Where does the letter go?

Your letter will be forwarded to the recipient's transplant center, whose responsibility it is to pass your letter along to the recipient. This process may take several weeks.

## Will I hear from the recipient?

Some recipients may choose to send a letter or card in response to your letter. Other recipients may choose not to write to you at this time; this is their personal decision. Please do not take such inaction personally, as many transplant recipients feel overwhelmed with emotion and have difficulty expressing their gratitude in writing. However, based on our experience, all transplant recipients are profoundly grateful for your gift of life, with many choosing to express their gratitude through community service.

## Sample letter

Tina Ray, the mother of 23-year-old organ donor Michael Smith, wrote this letter to her son's recipients on his first anniversary:

May 20, 2011

"Dear Recipient,

It is amazing to me that our one-year anniversary is approaching. I would like to take this opportunity to tell you about my son, Michael, your organ donor. Mike was 23 years old at the time of his death

and he is the father of a beautiful two-and-a-half year old daughter, and the love of his life was her mother, Sarah.

Michael was the kid who always wanted to be older than he was; he had a busy mind and was always working on something. Mike loved anything mechanical, especially fast cars and motorcycles. Mike was the kid who took things apart just to see if he could put them back together.

When Mike was 16, I purchased a Saturn for him to drive – not the car of his choice but it was better than nothing. Needless to say, he was pretty rough on this vehicle and blew the transmission in a few short months. I told him he needed to fix it or walk. He went to the local junkyard, bought a used transmission, installed it in the vehicle and was on his way to being a very successful auto mechanic. By the time Michael turned 18, he had a job waiting for him as a technician at a very prominent auto dealership.

Michael was also an avid fisherman – he LOVED to fish – he would fish in a puddle. One of the last things he did with his daughter Kalie was to take her fishing with her Barbie fishing pole (she still remembers).

I want you to know that we have a sense of peace knowing that Michael was able to help so many families at the time of his death. Please enjoy your gift. Life is much too short to do anything else but to live, love and enjoy every day.

I think about you and pray for your good health every day. I hope that some day, we will be able to meet. I have enclosed some pictures so you can see who Michael was.”

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