



South Texas Blood & Tissue

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Uvalde shooting survivor meets blood donors who helped save her life

Meeting comes as South Texas Blood & Tissue marks fifth anniversary of program designed to boost survival in trauma cases

SAN ANTONIO – A 10-year-old survivor of the Uvalde School shooting and her parents got to thank another set of life-savers – her blood donors – on Saturday as South Texas Blood & Tissue marked the fifth anniversary of a lifesaving whole-blood donor program.

Christina and Ruben Zamora have met and thanked everyone from emergency medical technicians to trauma surgeons involved in the care of their daughter Mayah, who was injured in the shooting at Robb Elementary School in May 2022.

But Saturday was the first time for them to meet those who gave the blood, including a 17-year-old girl whose first-ever donation was used as part of emergency treatment.

“We’re forever grateful to the people who saved my life,” Mayah said, “and I hope my story will let people know how important donating blood is to saving lives.”

Among the donors at the event whose blood helped save Mayah was 17-year-old Adrianna Garcia, whose donation at a drive at Poteet High School was her first. Mayah and her family also got to meet donors Larry Whatley, who has been giving blood since 1976, and Sylvia Enriquez.

Mayah received specially screened blood from the South Texas Blood & Tissue Heroes in Arms program, which supplies emergency responders with blood that can be transfused to any patient in emergency trauma situations, as opposed to once the patient reaches the hospital. She also received O-negative blood, which is given in many cases to pediatric patients.

“What we’re seeing here today is living proof that this program makes a difference,” said Dr. Ronald M. Stewart, a surgeon at University Health’s Level I trauma center and Chair of the Department of Surgery at UT Health San Antonio.

Stewart told Mayah’s parents that she survived the helicopter trip to University Hospital’s trauma center because of blood transfusions. As a result, Christina and Ruben Zamora have become strong advocates for blood donations.

“You’ve got to make something good out of something so bad,” Christina Zamora said. “This is something that is part of the good that she can do.”

Ruben Zamora encouraged people across South Texas to donate.

“I’m going to be the second one in my family to give blood, and I’m terrified, but Mayah said she would hold my hand,” he said.

Adrienne Mendoza, Chief Operating Officer, South Texas Blood & Tissue, highlighted the need for blood at all times.

“Mayah’s story, for us, is a powerful symbol of the need for all kinds of donors and the need for donors to continue to give blood,” she said. “We hope people realize the need.

“It was the blood given by generous donors in the days ahead of Uvalde that was ready for Mayah that tragic day,” she said. “By becoming a regular blood donor and giving four times a year, you’ll help our community be ready at any time for any tragedy or need.”

The meeting between the 10-year-old patient and some of her blood donors was part of a transformative day for Heroes in Arms, the first civilian program in the country designed to save lives through blood donation in emergency vehicles.

Saturday marked the re-branding of the program, which launched five years ago as Brothers in Arms, seeking male donors with type O-positive blood and low levels of certain antibodies. A combination of greater demand and new screening has allowed South Texas Blood & Tissue to open the program to certain female donors – hence, the name change to Heroes in Arms.

The program provides whole blood to emergency responders and follows research by the U.S. Army showing improved survival rates for trauma patients who were transfused whole blood, as opposed to blood that has been separated into its three major components (plasma, platelets and red cells.)

A study published in the Annals of Surgery journal last year confirmed the statistics from the military.

“Compared with BCT [blood component therapy] the use of WB [whole blood] was associated with a 48% reduction in mortality in trauma patients,” the study’s conclusions said. “Our study supports the use of WB use in the resuscitation of trauma patients.”

The whole blood program was launched in conjunction with the South Texas Regional Advisory Council, which coordinates emergency care in 22 counties, and major medical

helicopter services. It since has expanded to the city's two level 1 trauma centers, University Hospital and San Antonio Military Medical Center, as well as San Antonio Fire Department units, and hospitals and EMS services throughout the region.

The concept of whole-blood transfusion was pioneered in South Texas by Dr. Donald Jenkins, who worked on a similar program for the U.S. Army in Afghanistan and a pilot program at the Mayo Clinic before coming to University Health System and UT Health San Antonio.

In one of the fastest-growing regions in the country, the demand for blood in trauma situations has created a need for an expanded donor pool to join this program. Women who have never been pregnant and have low levels of certain antibodies are eligible to be Heroes in Arms donors, as pregnancy tends to produce higher levels of antibodies.

For more information, donors can call 210-731-5590 or visit SouthTexasBlood.org.

About South Texas Blood & Tissue: South Texas Blood & Tissue (STB&T) is a nonprofit community blood center that provides blood, plasma, platelets and other blood components to 100 hospitals in 48 South Texas counties. It is the largest blood supplier in our region. In addition, STB&T supports the development of advanced therapies, including those derived from donated human cells and tissues used in research and in new therapies and cures for cancers and degenerative diseases. Through the generous life-legacy gifts of human tissue, STB&T also supports development of tissue allografts for patients in need of reconstructive surgery, repair or tissue regeneration. South Texas Blood & Tissue has a 49-year history serving the South Texas community and is part of the BioBridge Global family of nonprofit organizations, which offers services in regenerative medicine and research including blood banking and resource management; cellular therapy; umbilical cord blood collection and storage; donated human tissue recovery and distribution for transplant; and testing of blood and plasma to help patients in the United States and worldwide. STB&T has nine donor centers in South Texas and conducts hundreds of mobile blood drives each year. Learn more at SouthTexasBlood.org.

About BioBridge Global: BioBridge Global (BBG) is a San Antonio-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit regenerative medicine enterprise that offers diverse services through its subsidiaries – South Texas Blood & Tissue, QualTex Laboratories, GenCure and The Blood & Tissue Center Foundation. BBG provides products and services in blood resource management, cellular therapy, donated umbilical cord blood and human tissue, as well as testing of blood, plasma and tissue products for clients in the United States and worldwide. BBG is committed to saving and enhancing lives through the healing power of human cells and tissue. It enables advances in the field of regenerative medicine by providing access to human cells and tissue, testing services and biomanufacturing and clinical trials support. Learn more at BioBridgeGlobal.org.

In the photos:

Mayah Zamora takes a selfie with Adrianna Garcia, whose first-ever blood donation was used while treating Zamora following the shootings at Robb Elementary School in Uvade, Texas, in May 2022.

Mayah Zamora speaks to news media following her meetings with blood donors, as her parents Christina and Ruben look on.

