

SKIN-VINCIBLE

A STORY OF A SUPERSTAR
WITH ICHTHYOSIS

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SKIN-VINCIBLE CHILDREN'S BOOK EMPOWERS KIDS WITH VISIBLE DIFFERENCES AND RAISES AWARENESS FOR THE RARE SKIN CONDITION ICHTHYOSIS

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Stillwater native Andrea Rustad, MD, a 2023 graduate of Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, wrote and published a children's book about ichthyosis, a rare group of skin conditions, to empower children with this condition to be confident in who they are, and raise awareness.

Andrea Rustad, MD, from Stillwater, Minnesota grew up with a skin condition, atopic dermatitis, and thus became interested in dermatology. She first learned about ichthyosis when she volunteered at Camp Discovery in Cross Lake, MN. While there, she heard heartbreaking stories from children with ichthyosis about the social and bullying challenges that they regularly face. This led her to pursue ichthyosis research as a medical student with her mentor, Dr. Amy Paller, at Northwestern University in Chicago. She discovered from families she interviewed that these challenges often stem from the public's lack of knowledge on skin conditions. She worked closely with the Foundation for Ichthyosis and Related Skin Types (FIRST) to host virtual and in-person sessions with affected children and their families to discuss bullying, hear stories, and collect advice.

Rustad thought a book about ichthyosis could help by explaining ichthyosis on a level that makes sense to children and can be read to the classmates of kids with ichthyosis. "I heard from many children with ichthyosis that they don't often identify with characters in books or movies," she said. "I wanted to provide more representation for these children with this book, so that they can read it and identify with the characters and know that they are not alone. Recognizing the complexities, uniqueness and strengths of individuals helps us understand one another for every aspect that makes us who we are."

The book, "Skin-vincible", follows a young girl with ichthyosis through a day in her life as she prepares to perform in a talent show. Along the way, it describes what ichthyosis is and how this affects parts of her daily life. In addition to highlighting ichthyosis, this book showcases other visible differences in appearance and abilities to inclusively show children that they are not alone and addresses how to build confidence and stand up to bullying.

Rustad's hope with the book is that "those who have ichthyosis, and their families, feel represented...that this book educates others about ichthyosis, decreases bullying, and makes kids with ichthyosis and any visible difference feel less alone." The book is available on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and Mascot Books online: www.mascotbooks.com/mascot-marketplace/buy-books/childrens/picture-books/skin-vincible. Profits will be donated to FIRST and Camp Discovery.

"The book was therapeutic for me...The ending is so meaningful. It was a great touch that you included actual pictures of kids with ichthyosis. Just fantastic."

- Jeanie C., mother of child with ichthyosis

"Skin-Vincible teaches you how to be a friend and help someone who is different. I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to educate their child on skin disorders or someone who is different."

- Joe C., father of child with ichthyosis