

celebrations!

Walter, 2
Soft tissue cancer

"I have a community"

VIRTUAL

WORLD BUILDS
CRUCIAL FRIENDSHIPS



BREAKTHROUGHS
TO TALK ABOUT

Historic Gift

SUPERCHARGES

Cancer Care

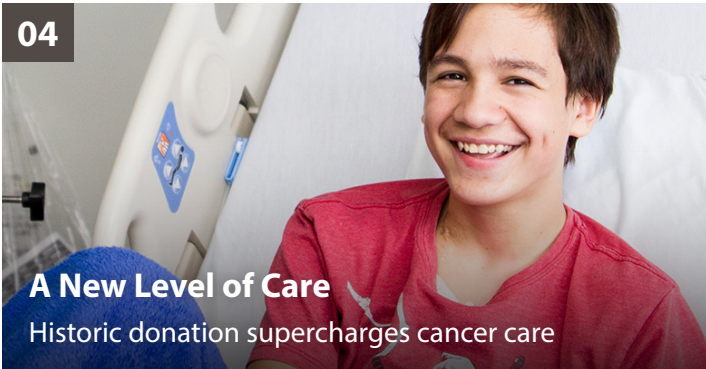


ON THE COVER

At 10 months old, Walter was diagnosed with rhabdomyosarcoma, an aggressive soft tissue cancer which started as a tumour in his lip. He underwent two surgeries to remove the tumour and months of chemotherapy. Walter and his family celebrated the end of his treatment in January 2023 at Children’s Hospital at London Health Sciences Centre. His oncologist, Dr. Chantel Cacciotti, continues to monitor him closely to ensure his cancer remains in remission. Thank you for helping children, like Walter!

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Children’s Board of Directors

Letter from the CEO & Board Chair

Do you remember your family putting on the record player on Saturday mornings? Or dialing a payphone to call for a ride home? Or the constant battle between using your landline or the Internet?

Technology and the world look very different today. We chuckle to see the new generations struggle to work or even identify the relics of our younger years. They’ll never know the simplicity of our childhoods, and they will also, fortunately, never know some of the tragedies our families experienced.

Medical professionals today are saving babies born as early as 22 weeks gestation. Children diagnosed with cancer have more hope than ever before. Little ones born with congenital heart defects are growing up and starting families of their own.

Health care has evolved rapidly in the past few decades, along with every other facet of our world. More children are surviving the previously unsurvivable. Innovative, passionate, and caring people working together have brought us here. Our grandparents, parents and even you and I have been part of shaping lifesaving and life-changing paediatric care.

In this issue of celebrations!, we celebrate some of the accomplishments of this past year and the past few decades. We also look to the future –

because, as far as we have come, there is more exciting and transformative work to be done.

Increased survivorship, a growing population in Southwestern Ontario and modern care models, means change is necessary.

Children’s Hospital and London Health Sciences Centre have an ambitious plan to revolutionize the delivery of health care and enhance the pursuit of game-changing research.

The goal is to save more young lives while also giving children the greatest quality of life in and out of hospital.

As we look to these new horizons, we are reminded of how far we have come and that brighter futures are never created alone. We call again on our community of innovative, passionate, and caring people.

Let us join together once more to shape a powerful and lasting legacy that will benefit generations to come.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to our children. We can’t wait to share more of the vision with you in the coming months.

Scott Fortnum,
President & CEO,
Children’s Health Foundation

Farah Rohoman,
Chair, Board of Directors
Children’s Health Foundation



A New Level of Care

Historic donation supercharges the Childhood Cancer Program team's inspiring work to protect children's futures.

After four months of treatment and a bone marrow transplant, Luka's cancer was finally in remission. His family celebrated the news with laughter and smiles – particularly because Ollie the Therapeutic Clown had marked the occasion with a toilet paper prank.

Luka was healthy and thriving. But then a little over two years later, during some routine monitoring, medical professionals at Children's Hospital found some concerning results. The disease had returned.

Over the past 40 years, the overall survival rate of childhood cancer has risen significantly to above 80%. However, this number doesn't tell the full story.

By age 45, as many as 80 per cent of childhood cancer survivors will develop a serious or life-threatening late effect, from hearing loss and impaired vision to organ damage and the development of subsequent cancers.

"Luka is the strongest kid I know and to tell him, I'm sorry it's back again..." says his mom, Michelle, pausing to fight back her tears. "It broke my heart."

Children's Childhood Cancer Program team once again wrapped around Luka and his family, providing exceptional supportive care and treatment.

"You can't get any better than here in London," says Michelle.

Led by Dr. Alexandra Zorzi, Division Head, Children's Childhood Cancer Program team are dedicated to providing world-class care and exploring new horizons for advancement.

"Our children diagnosed with cancer deserve to have their childhoods protected and to grow up to enjoy a healthy adulthood free of complications," says Dr. Zorzi. "It's why our team is fervently committed to pushing the boundaries of care."

The team has one of the highest numbers of clinical trials running at London Health Sciences Centre, connecting patients to novel therapies years sooner. They are leaders in research on quality improvement and quality care. They have amassed a significant genomics database for personalized medicine research and they're part of Precision Oncology for Young People (PROFYLE), a



pan-Canadian project to find new treatment avenues for patients with hard-to-treat or rare cancers.

A historic donation from a local London couple has supercharged the team's inspiring work. Dieter and Lyse Jahnke gifted \$5 million toward the Childhood Cancer Program this past year. It is the largest gift Children's Health Foundation has ever received for Children's Hospital.

The Jahnke family's investment will be foundational in establishing The Jahnke Family Paediatric

Oncology Centre of Excellence.

"This generous and heartfelt gift from the Jahnke family is empowering us to rethink and

The new centre will enhance and integrate all aspects of cancer care at Children's Hospital to modernize and create a nimble delivery mode to meet and exceed the evolving practice of oncology care, while also streamlining and

redesign how space, technology, and our care team wraps around each and every patient, which will help us reach a new level of care," says Dr. Zorzi.

Children's Hospital is the regional paediatric oncology centre for Southwestern Ontario and parts of Northwestern Ontario. Each year, 70 children are newly diagnosed with cancer, 150 children are currently on active therapy, and more than 300 childhood cancer survivors are monitored and cared for in the Aftercare Program.

strengthening clinical trial work and research.

Today, Luka is in remission. The 19-year-old is working to become an electrician. When he and his family heard about the Jahnke's investment in the Childhood Cancer Program, they were overjoyed.

"What an amazing gift, this brings tears to our eyes. This generous donation will make a world of difference for our kids," says Luka and his family.



"There is nothing more meaningful than writing the last chapter of your life and dedicating an everlasting gift for children that will impact many generations. We invite other community-minded individuals and companies to join us in investing in Children's Hospital's Childhood Cancer Program to protect children from this horrible disease."



UNLOCKING CHILDHOOD CANCER

Precision medicine vital to driving innovation in cancer care

When we think of childhood cancer, most of us immediately picture children with no hair, experiencing severe nausea. The reality of cancer care is that kids and teens respond to treatment in vastly different ways.

One form of chemotherapy for a seven-year-old boy might make him nauseous all day; for another seven-year-old boy, that same round of chemo might be nearly symptom-free.

Within Children's Hospital's Childhood Cancer Program, each young patient is seen as the unique kid they are, with their own coping strategies, genetic make-up and symptoms.

Viewing kids and their cancer in

this patient-specific way means the team stays curious, investigating and unlocking new ways to save kids' lives.

Understanding targeted therapy; how each child's cancer responds to different medications and treatments, and personalized medicine; how each child tolerates their therapy, are the two crucial components of precision medicine and are vital to innovation in childhood cancer treatments.

Targeted Therapy Creates New Options for Hard-to-Treat Cancers

With the team's involvement in international and national research projects like Precision Oncology for Young People (PROFYLE), they

can begin to understand some of the unique molecular mechanisms behind a specific tumour or cancer and match that mechanism with existing medication.

This is known as targeted therapy, where patients may benefit from being treated with a drug not before used on their particular type of cancer. PROFYLE specifically focuses on cancers that are difficult to treat, and assisting children who face poor outcomes.

As the Division Head of Children's Childhood Cancer Program, Dr. Alexandra Zorzi explains, "Childhood cancer is not the same as adult cancer. But we explore overlaps – things we can learn from adults' tumours and treatments that may allow us to

understand childhood cancer better."

Imagine each cancer is a lock, and every medication is a key. Currently, the team can use all the keys at their disposal for a certain lock, but they don't always have the right one.

Targeted therapy makes it possible for clinicians to find more keys – more medication options – and more chances to save lives.

A recent success is adult lung cancer medications being connected to paediatric neuroblastomas, a cancer that is extremely difficult to treat.

Through PROFYLE, these cancers have been found to share a mutation, which means Children's can help work towards lung cancer medications being used to help kids with neuroblastomas.

Children's dedication to helping study complex mutations and cancers brings an abundance of hope for future patients.

As a dedicated mother, Sarah, explains, "My son Hunter didn't have a textbook neuroblastoma. His cancer had a unique mutation, and cases like his are studied to help more kids. My creative, truck-loving and imaginative little boy will help save the next child. I am so proud of my son, knowing his legacy will be helping his Children's team that loved him provide more advanced care for our kids."

Personalized Medicine Helps Reduce Harsh Side Effects

The Childhood Cancer Program team doesn't stop at having more keys. Giving kids the best care also means studying their genetics to help discover how they may

react to new medication options, known as pharmacogenomics or personalized medicine.

"While chemotherapy is a tried-and-true drug for treating cancer, combining chemotherapy with specific keys to a child's cancer has the potential to improve children's outcomes and lessen their side effects," explains Dr. Zorzi.

In partnership with Dr. Richard Kim, a leading expert in pharmacogenomics, Dr. Zorzi is matching kids' genetics with their treatments and outcomes. The pair is working towards predicting how patients' bodies will handle their medications – whether it's traditional chemotherapy or one of the new keys Children's is working so hard to help find.

When children's genetics are considered alongside their new medication, incredible things can happen. For one of Dr. Zorzi's young patients, a clinical trial at Children's changed the way she and her family experienced her cancer relapse.

"An experimental immunotherapy medication, Blinatumomab, replaced a whole block of my daughter's chemotherapy and made a world of difference," says Adrienne, a grateful mother. "With Blinatumomab, my daughter had energy and none of the lethargy and weakness she did during chemo. I couldn't believe it! I was blown away that she could be social and attend school."

Watching kids face cancer while feeling better than anyone thought possible is exactly what the Children's team hopes for.

"My intention for kids is for

them to be everything they were supposed to be had we never met," says Dr. Zorzi. "To go to school, get into trouble, play their favourite sports – to enjoy all those life experiences."

That dream gets closer every day with the team's dedication to finding more life-saving keys for kids' cancer, prescribed with their genes in mind.

Children's Childhood Cancer Program continues to push toward the innovations that help protect every child who walks through their door – and every parent who asks, "Why us?"

DID YOU KNOW?

Not every child loses their hair when they undergo cancer treatments. While hair loss is the most common and most recognizable side effect of cancer treatment, it doesn't happen to every child. How much hair kids and teens lose depends on the types of medications, the dosage, the combination of medications, how they are administered, and the length of their treatments.



Brain Tumours' Worst Enemy

Neuro-oncologist, Dr. Chantel Cacciotti is pushing the boundaries of cancer care

Dr. Chantel Cacciotti joined Children's Hospital's Childhood Cancer Program in 2020, following a sub-specialty fellowship in paediatric neuro-oncology at Boston Children's Hospital. With goals of improving patient survival and quality of life, she is involved in national and international research collaborations, paediatric clinical trials, and precision medicine-based studies.

Q+A

with **Dr. Chantel Cacciotti**

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WANT TO CARE FOR CHILDREN DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER AND PARTICULARLY THOSE WITH BRAIN TUMORS?

My sister was diagnosed with cancer when she was just an infant. Watching the care that she received opened my eyes to this area and made me want to pursue a career in paediatric oncology from a young age. My fellowship at McMaster University inspired me to sub-specialize in neuro-oncology. I truly feel like we have room to improve the treatments, outcomes and toxicities of our therapy in this population.

BRAIN AND SPINAL CORD TUMOURS ACCOUNT FOR 25% OF ALL CHILDHOOD CANCERS. WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES FOR THESE PATIENTS?

There are many different types of brain and spinal tumours, and survival rates depend on the type of tumour, diagnosis and how advanced the disease is. Some brain tumors have excellent survival rates, whereas others are dismal. Some children who do survive experience life-altering complications. They may live with seizures, learning difficulties, weakness or mobility challenges, to name a few.

DETECTION AND DIAGNOSIS ARE OBVIOUSLY CRUCIAL FIRST STEPS IN CHILDHOOD CANCER CARE. CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR EXCITING RESEARCH IN THIS AREA?

Currently, I'm leading a national clinical trial, alongside my colleagues at SickKids, to investigate liquid

biopsy. Our aim is to detect circulating tumor cells in cerebrospinal fluid or blood. We believe that with a simple blood test or fluid from a spinal tap, we will be able to determine if someone is responding to treatment, if their tumor is coming back or if they're at a higher potential for relapse. The cerebrospinal fluid may also allow us to diagnose tumours that are in locations that are unsafe for surgeons to biopsy. This could change the way we manage patients with brain tumours.

WHAT ARE SOME AVENUES YOU'RE INVESTIGATING TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF BRAIN TUMOUR SURVIVORS?

Toxicity from cancer treatment can have a life-long impact. Part of my research focuses on the long-term survivor population and the impacts the treatment may have had on them. One such example is cardiac toxicity, where the heart may be damaged by the cancer treatment. I am involved in collaborative research with other international centres to evaluate patients at risk for these long-term side effects. Earlier detection of this would allow us to put preventative measures into place sooner. Through these collaborative survivor-based projects, I am also researching the optimal monitoring, in terms of frequency, type of imaging and other aspects, that is most beneficial in cancer survivors.

YOU ARE PART OF THE CANADIAN BRAIN TUMOUR CONSORTIUM. TELL US ABOUT THAT WORK AND HOW IT IS IMPACTING CARE.

The Canadian Brain Tumour Consortium is a national investigator network composed of brain tumour specialists and researchers. Through this large-scale collaboration we are participating in exciting multi-site clinical trials. These clinical trials provide our patients with early access to promising new therapies while also helping shape the future of neuro-oncology care for the world.

To read the full interview visit childhealth.ca/brain



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For less than a dollar a day, you can help support the best care at Children's Hospital and innovative research initiatives at Children's Health Research Institute.

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Did You Know?

Donor-supported programs

01



Nature for Healing has implemented nature prescriptions, where patients are prescribed to spend time in nature

02



The Youth Indigenous Wellness Program is leading efforts to create a paediatric Healing Space for patients and families to practice their Indigenous culture

03



Children's Neonatal Paediatric Transport Team covers the largest geographic region of all the paediatric hospital transport teams in Ontario

04



Youth CoRE, an innovative peer support program for patients, was designated a leading practice by the Health Standards Organization

05



The Family Assistance Program provides financially stressed patient families support with food, transportation, hotels and medical expenses



BREAKTHROUGHS TO TALK ABOUT

With over 100 years of history, Children's Hospital and Children's Health Research Institute have celebrated countless breakthroughs in paediatric care. Children's best care is possible because of our team's commitment to collaboration. At Children's, leading minds, equipment, research and the generosity of our community all work together to foster innovations that transform kids' health care.

1 INNOVATIVE LEADERSHIP MODEL IMPROVES EARLY CARE

Children's Hospital launched a novel midwifery leadership structure to address barriers faced by women and birthing people and improve health outcomes for them and their babies. The Department of Midwifery now has a first-of-its-kind limited term chair and a first-in-Canada clinical lead and research lead. As a result, the Department has already been able to create a Bilirubin Clinic and an Early Discharge Program, change policies that directly impact women's care and reduce emergency room visits.

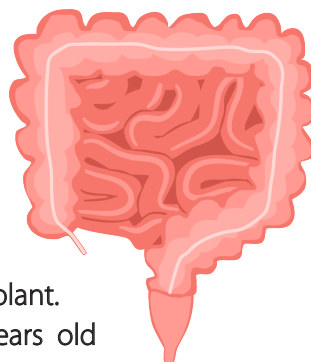
2 CANADA FIRST IMPROVES SEVERE PAEDIATRIC EPILEPSY

Children's Hospital is the first centre in Canada to perform Radiofrequency Thermocoagulation for paediatric epilepsy treatment, using the ROSA One Brain Robotic Arm. Radiofrequency Thermocoagulation is a procedure that uses radio waves, through electrodes, to heat and destroy tissue in the areas of the brain that have been identified as the source of seizure activity. The first patient to receive this procedure went from having up to 30 seizures a day to being seizure free.



3 WORLD'S YOUNGEST MULTI-ORGAN TRANSPLANT

Children's Hospital performed a multi-organ transplant to save the life of a six-month-old baby in 1997. Sarah was born with a genetic condition, causing her bladder, intestines, pancreas, and liver to work improperly. Because of her surgery, Sarah remains a Guinness World Record-Book holder for being the world's youngest multi-organ transplant. Today, she is 27 years old and thriving.

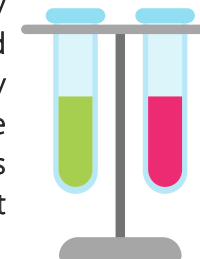


4 REVOLUTIONARY TECHNOLOGY TO ADVANCE PERSONALIZED MEDICINE

Local researchers, led by Dr. Douglas Fraser, are harnessing revolutionary technology to advance personalized medicine for children with severe traumatic brain injuries (TBI). Armed with analytical and computational technologies, which seamlessly integrates various data sets, they will be able to divide TBI patients into more meaningful subgroups – which hasn't previously been possible. This will allow them to deliver interventions that are precisely targeted to optimize patient outcomes and bring in a new era of transformative health care for paediatric illness.

5 NEW CANCER DRUG TRIALED AT CHILDREN'S IMPROVES SURVIVAL

Children facing relapsed and refractory Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (ALL) have improved survival outcomes with blinatumomab, the first new paediatric cancer treatment for relapsed and refractory ALL since the days of Terry Fox. As a member of the consortium of the Children's Oncology Group, Children's Childhood Cancer Program was a key part of the cooperative group trial that brought this game-changing treatment to patients worldwide.



6 GENERATIONS OF NEWBORNS SAVED WITH SURFACTANT

Thousands of babies suffering from neonatal respiratory distress syndrome have been saved through the development of Bovine Lung Extract Surfactant. This discovery, made by Dr. Fred Possmayer and his research team, including Dr. Victor Han, Dr. Graham Chance and Dr. Paul Harding, in the 1980s, is now a standard for neonatal care. It is recognized as one of the top five discoveries in Ontario, alongside insulin.



7 RESEARCH DRIVING MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM CHANGE

A national study led by local researcher, Dr. Naveen Poonai, could be significant in driving critical system change in youth mental health. The study revealed that adolescent emergency department visits and hospitalizations for suicidal thoughts, self-harm and self-poisoning increased across Canada throughout the pandemic, especially among teen girls ages 10 to 14. These findings highlight for community leaders the need to invest in multiple ways for youth to access mental health supports, as well as bolster early intervention initiatives.



From HOSPITAL to SECOND Home

Along the centre of Maia's chest runs a long and bold red scar – and she is fiercely proud of it.

"I call it my warrior wound," says Maia. "It's the physical proof of what I survived and I'm so grateful for the care I received."

Maia was born two months premature and weighing a mere 3lbs 15oz. Her prematurity caused complications, including ear and eye issues and life-threatening congenital heart defects. She needed intensive care and then open-heart surgery at seven months old.

Maia is among a growing number of children who, through modern medicine, are surviving conditions that were unsurvivable in the past and growing up with a close relationship with the health care system.

Following her surgery, Maia needed ongoing care from Children's Hospital.

"In Grade 3, I remember her standing in front of her class with her bravery beads, sharing what each of them represented – the bloodwork, transfusions, echoes, needles and the surgery that she had experienced," recalls Maia's

mom, Kim. "It was a lot for a little kid, but she's come to a place where she owns her story."

Kim believes that the welcoming and supportive environment at Children's was crucial in supporting Maia's development.

Children's Hospital is transformed from a sterile, scary and overwhelming facility into a second home by dedicated staff, poke free play spaces, calming nature areas and child and family-centred programs, like Ollie the Clown, Music and Art Therapy, and Child Life. Aside from the staff, most of these are considered 'extras' in tight health care budgets. They are only possible through complete or part funding by caring and generous donors to Children's Health Foundation.

Karen Groeneweg has worked as a Child Life Specialist at Children's Hospital for 15 years. She says it's critical for patients' well-being to have a hospital environment that is as normal as possible for children.

"Frequent hospitalization can negatively influence a child's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development," says Karen. "Being confined to a bed, requiring care in an isolation room, experiencing a trauma, worrying

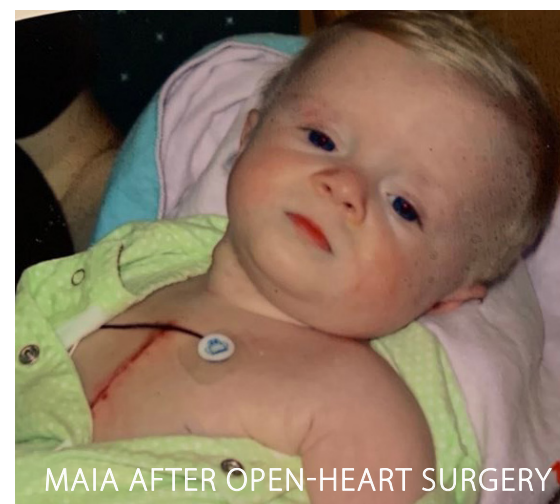
about their survival – all of these difficult experiences can have a long-term impact."

Hospitalized children can miss important milestones. They are at an increased risk of mental health issues, including anxiety

and depression. And they are also at increased risk of bullying involvement.

Child Life Specialists are certified professionals trained to mitigate the effects of frequent hospitalization. They utilize the vast applications of

play to promote psychosocial and emotional well-being in children. From educating children about their diagnosis to preparing them for procedures to planning special holiday events and supporting peer interactions, every day looks different for Child Life Specialists.



MAIA AFTER OPEN-HEART SURGERY



MAIA AND HER MOM



MAIA TODAY, WITH HER BRAVERY BEADS



Child Life at Work

"Some people might think our job is to make patients happy but that's not our focus," says Karen. "We bring something really unique into the room. We have no medical agenda, and we are able to just sit with kids in their challenging moments. Whether they are sad, mad, frustrated or overwhelmed, we validate their experience, help them feel heard and build their coping skills."

This past year, 23 Child Life Specialists supported children during nearly 21,400 sessions, a significant increase over five years ago. Children's Hospital is caring for more children than ever before, as a result of a rising population (London is one of Canada's fastest growing cities) and increased



PAINTING WITH A
CHILD LIFE SPECIALIST



OLLIE THE
THERAPEUTIC
CLOWN

survivorship.

"In addition to the increased numbers, we are also finding that since the global pandemic, children and families are requiring more time and energy to help develop strong coping skills," says Karen. "Given the pressures on the program, we frequently have to triage."

Donor support helped to add two additional positions in 2022 and Child Life hopes to further build program capacity in the future.

The Music Therapy Program has also experienced a high demand for services and was able to expand through increased donor support in 2022.

This unique therapeutic avenue uses a child or youth's connection with music as the foundation to improve areas of health, development, and well-being.

"What makes Music Therapy distinct is that it can address a plethora of needs and goals with patients from infancy to adolescence," says Karina Charczuk, Music Therapist.

"We have no medical agenda, and we are able to just sit with kids in their challenging moments."

For an infant, music can positively impact their heart rate, respiratory rate, and stress levels, while also helping them to bond with their parent. While for a teen, it might offer an outlet to open up about living with anorexia and how their condition affects them and their loved ones.

Of the child and family-centred programs, Ollie the Therapeutic Clown left the most lasting impression on Maia. Ollie uses humour, magic, play and creative expression to create a personal and trusting atmosphere between hospital workers and patients.

"Maia doesn't have a lot of vivid memories as a young child but one she can remember is

seeing Ollie. He would come into the cardiology waiting room to bring children laughter and relief," says Kim.

Both Kim and Maia are also quick to add that the supportive environment of Children's Hospital isn't just lost when a patient turns 18 either. Maia, now 20, recently graduated to adult care.

"The transition of care was seamless," says Maia. "They started preparing us when I was 17 years old. They matched me with a cardiologist I was comfortable with and who specializes in my exact defect. They set me up perfectly so that I would be taken care of properly."

From day one through to her final day receiving care from Children's Hospital, Maia and Kim say the care has been incredible.

"And donors are part of that," says Kim. "You safeguard our children's well-being through child and family-centred programs, while simultaneously pushing care forward to new heights so that the future is brighter. We are truly grateful."

Leaving a gift in your Will can create a better future for sick children.

Anyone can make a gift to Children's Health Foundation in their Will, and arranging your gift is a simple process. Start planning your legacy today and join us for in-person or virtual Income Tax Reduction and Estate Planning presentations offered throughout the year.

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Vicki Hayter





Building VIRTUAL Friendships

TVCC researchers are exploring how to cultivate and support online friendships amongst children with disabilities

Do you remember those days in the schoolyard, the sun beaming down on the jungle gym while your best friend chased after you for that game of tag? Or maybe they finally talked you into trading that snack they'd been eyeing in your lunch pail?

Friendship is a crucial part of every child's life. As we grow up, those early bonds become part of who we are today.

That's why TVCC is dedicated to supporting children and youth with disabilities in every facet of their lives – including beneficial connections like friendship.

With an entire research program focused on studying the factors that influence clients' quality of life, clients can always look to TVCC for guidance and understanding.

Today, TVCC researcher, Eric Smart, is part of a collaborative research effort with Holland Bloorview, working on studies that examine new and alternative

ways to support youth with disabilities in achieving goals related to friendship.

With these research efforts, TVCC is a part of ensuring that anyone who wants to have friends can have friends.

The research group started by reviewing existing studies about supporting youth in socializing online. The group's scoping review concluded that these three experiences are essential to making friends in virtual spaces: doing activities that increase social confidence, feeling safe to express oneself, and learning how to use technology independently.

An established benefit of virtual spaces for youth is the ability to shape how their peers see them. They can adjust their environment, control what they share at their first meeting and take extra time to respond to messages. This flexibility helps overcome the barriers of shyness and nervousness as youth can take the time to type their thoughts.

Given TVCC's dedication to providing youth with

the support and services that best further their goals, an additional study is investigating how TVCC and Holland Bloorview can bring more virtual social programming to clients.

For the study *Facilitating virtual social connections for youth with disabilities: lessons for post-COVID-19 programming*, researchers conducted interviews and focus groups to determine what participants and service providers liked and disliked about the current virtual programs.

During the study, one youth shared the positive impact of virtual programming on their life: "Honestly, it really helped me a lot overall as a person... I hope to see programs like this continue ... I just still feel like I have a community that I belong to, and I think that says a lot, like, you don't feel like you're alone."

Findings also revealed that for some youth with disabilities, making friends through a virtual program may not be the most accessible or convenient option, but the only option available.

"There was one individual that didn't want to turn on their camera and it was because they wanted to take time out of their wheelchair and so in order to do that they had to lie down. It made me wonder, would this youth not have been able to participate if they had to come onsite?" a service provider noted in the study.

By exploring the design of effective virtual programs and how they encourage friendship, TVCC's research is helping remove barriers to friendship, while actively creating environments that provide more opportunities for children and youth to form close bonds.

With the support of TVCC, connection comes in all forms. Desktop screens load with smiling faces, empty seats in programs are filled with peers, that nagging voice saying "you don't belong" starts to fade, and suddenly, as if all at once, friendships form. And the impact of that bond never fades.



ZOE AND SARA





A HEART OF GOLD

Joanne shows her devotion for helping children with a gift to Children's in her Will

Helping others is in Joanne's DNA. She vividly remembers participating in her first fundraising event at 10 years old – a 25-mile (yes, we used miles back then, she says with a chuckle) walk-a-thon to build a school in Brazil. Since that first experience, she hasn't stopped raising funds and awareness for causes close to her heart.

Children's Health Foundation is one of those causes.

As a proud aunt to 13 nieces and nephews and a great aunt to 18 children, she knows how important it is to invest in specialized paediatric health care for our region.

"Children's Hospital's trauma team saved my youngest niece from respiratory distress when she was a newborn. They've cared for many of my other nieces and nephews, and I've also witnessed more of the amazing work they do throughout my professional life," says Joanne.

Working at Walmart in Goderich for 25 years, Joanne was an enthusiastic charity coordinator and raised funds for Children's Hospital. Her role allowed her to participate in Children's Hospital Week in Florida and meet Champion Children from across North America. Champion Children have lived hospital experience and share their stories to illustrate the life-saving impact of health care donations.

"The children's resiliency and the beauty of their spirits continue to inspire me," says Joanne, who has also been a Caring Hearts monthly donor for 20 years.

With her long history of the cause and her passion for community, it was a no-brainer for Joanne to make the decision to leave a gift in her Will to Children's Health Foundation. She has also left specific instructions to include the Foundation as an option for a memorial donation.

"Whether I'm here or not, my legacy of helping others will continue," says Joanne. "I feel confident in choosing Children's Health Foundation because of the incredible level of caring I've seen from the staff for nearly three decades. I trust wholeheartedly that they will be good stewards of my gift."

Your Community IN ACTION



Together, we save and improve young lives!

2023 – 2024

Your Generosity and Impact

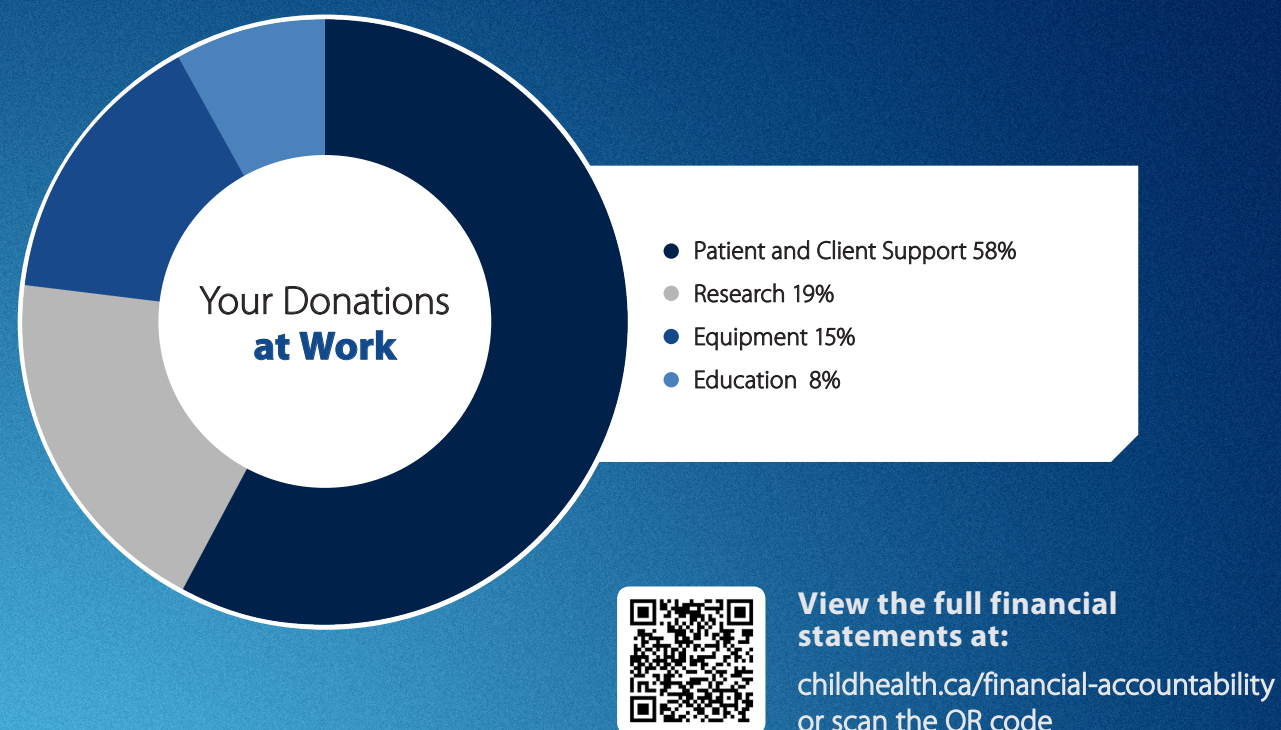
Total Revenue:
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