

News & Updates

November 2023 | Volume 14 - Number 10

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CFC #59853

Giving

It's not just about
the medicine! SM



Grateful For You

During this season of Thanksgiving, **we are grateful for you.** Thanks to our incredible supporters, our 13th Annual Candy & Snack Drive was a huge success. Boxes of items from our on-line Wish List flooded the Foundation.

In 2020, due to COVID-19, Mattie Miracle migrated away from a live Candy & Snack Drive to an all-virtual format. This was a difficult decision, especially since our Fall Drive had great community energy, spirit, and participation. We were concerned that the virtual format would greatly impact the success of the Drive. However, we have learned never to underestimate your loyalty and generosity.

All donated items will help to stock our four Snack & Item Carts at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital (Washington, DC), Children's Hospital at Sinai (Baltimore, MD), and the NIH Clinical Center (Bethesda, MD). Our supporters clearly understand how vital our Snack & Item Carts are to the **3,000 families we serve annually** who are caring for children with cancer and other life-threatening illnesses. Thank you for making these Mattie Miracles possible.



14 Years!

On November 2, 2023, Mattie Miracle celebrated its 14th birthday! **We are the only national non-profit dedicated to psychosocial support, awareness, advocacy, and funding innovative psychosocial research for childhood cancer.** We are grateful to our sponsors and supporters for making the Mattie Miracles possible.

Together we have:

- Raised over \$1M for childhood cancer
- Supported 38,000 children with cancer and their families
- Delivered 26,000 snacks to in-patient families
- Funded 6 child life specialists
- Awarded 14 M&M Wishes
- Funded 3 psychosocial therapy grants to children with cancer
- Awarded \$165,000 in psychosocial research grants
- Published the first evidence-based Psychosocial Standards of Care

Child Life Corner with Adina Levitan, CCLS



We welcome Child Life Corner to our newsletters. Each month you will hear from Mattie Miracle's Child Life Specialist, Adina Levitan. Adina will highlight topics, issues, and share stories from a child life professional's lens. Given the vital role child life plays in a child's medical and psychosocial journey, we are proud to feature this standing column.

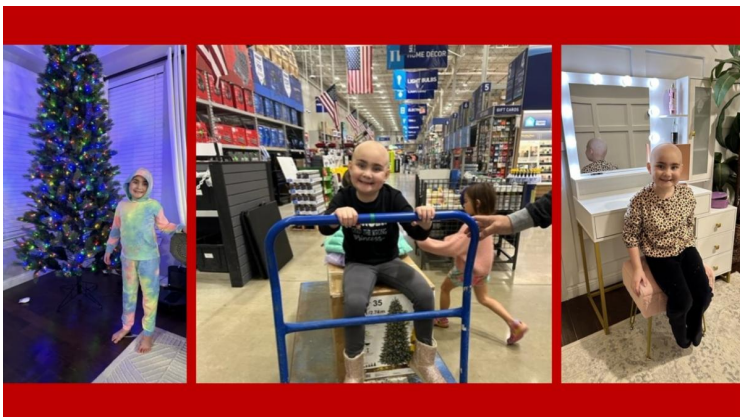
Many healthcare professionals will tell you that **teenagers can be a tricky population to work with in the hospital setting. Developmentally, teenagers are interested in their friends, their social circles, their appearances, and personal interests more than anything else.** Compounded with feeling crummy in the hospital setting, many teenagers will spend more time sleeping or on their phones to connect with their friends and disconnect from the hospital setting. Teenage boys find connections through video games where they can interact with their friends in a shared game. This was what I was presented with when a patient was admitted to my unit with a new diagnosis of leukemia.

Jake (name has been changed) was a sweet and pleasant, although incredibly anxious, teenager who found out he had cancer. During his initial diagnostic testing, Jake wanted to know the exact details of each procedure. He preferred visuals and tangible teaching items so he could understand each aspect of what to expect. When Jake's doctors told him he would receive a port, I walked him through the port placement and how his port would be accessed using Chester, our port teaching doll. **Jake was active in his care, however as the days turned into weeks and he was feeling less and less like himself, it was becoming harder and harder to motivate Jake to get out of bed.** Even more frustrating, he was limited to a single hallway in the unit that had a special airflow for immunocompromised patients. This meant that Jake could not go to the playroom and had very limited interactions.

Jake's doctors mentioned that it was incredibly important for Jake to get out of bed and move around. Not being able to leave his room meant the playroom, with a basketball hoop and foosball table, was not an option. **I knew that supporting Jake physically would require a huge emotional boost since he was incredibly down about being in the hospital.**

Together with the child life volunteers, we created a full obstacle course in the single hallway that Jake could access. We equipped the course with a target practice, a basketball hoop, remote control helicopters, water guns, and a syringe painting at the end. Jake had to navigate through the hallway, completing tasks as he went along. Nurses joined in, getting soaked by the water guns, while Jake laughed and smiled. The child life volunteer cheered him on. He did the course several times with his mother watching, smiling as well.

Child life specialists have to be creative in the hospital setting. Limitations such as the environment, medical restrictions, and physical needs affect the play options for our patients. We have to think outside the box to meet children's social, emotional, and physical needs. While some hospitals have reserved spaces for patients with cancer, thus protecting their immunocompromised systems, not all do. This means that small spaces such as rooms and hallways have to become playgrounds and gyms. **Funding child life programs enables child life specialists to have the resources and play items needed to support patients during extended hospitalizations. Thank you Mattie Miracle for understanding this vital need and for your incredible support.**



Making Wishes Come True

In 2021, Mattie Miracle launched its M&M (Margy & Mattie) Wishes Program in memory of our board member, Margy Jost. Margy was a steadfast supporter of children with cancer and devoted her life to this vital cause. **To date, Mattie Miracle has granted \$21,000 to children and their**

true. In many cases, families reach out to us because they do not qualify for support through other organizations, either due to the child's age, at what stage the child is within treatment, or because the child is receiving end of life care.

In October, Mattie Miracle received a request for a M&M Wish to be granted to a 7-year-old named Ashton. Ashton was diagnosed with Medulloblastoma in August. Amanda, her mom, told Mattie Miracle that since Ashton's diagnosis, "our whole world has been centered around cancer, and helping Ashton get better. This includes missing out on their sporting events, finishing out summer, fun after school activities, doing things as a family on the weekends, and so much more."

Mattie Miracle awarded Ashton \$1,200 to make her wishes come true, such as purchasing a new family Christmas tree, getting Christmas gifts for her siblings, and picking out a brand-new makeup vanity with lots of storage, a mirror with lights, and a plush pink stool. Amanda said that "Ashton has always been my girly girl who loves shopping, doing her hair, and makeup. Since we found out about her cancer, one of her favorite things has been doing make up. It gave her something to look forward to every day when she couldn't get out of bed."

Mattie Miracle is honored to support Ashton and her amazing family. Hearing the impact of this M&M Wish on Ashton's family reminds the Foundation of the importance of this program, the beauty of families coming together to share in fun activities, and the opportunity to create forever memories.

Reflections from Amanda (Ashton's mom):

I want you to know that with part of the M&M Wish grant, we were able to purchase a new Christmas tree as a family on November 18. This was so meaningful for us because for a few years, we have been using a broken tree that we would have to bootleg to work. It was always crooked and most of the time, the lights would go out mid-season and we would have to try and add new ones. We had this old tree since Ashton was a year old.

When we received Mattie Miracle's \$1,200 check, we were, and still are overwhelmed with your generosity. For this reason, we wanted Ashton to be able to choose something that was important and valuable to her and be intentional about spending her M&M Wish. As we were talking about decorating for Christmas, the conversation came up about "our tree" and we asked Ashton what she thought about using some of the money to buy a new one. She was thrilled to go shopping for one and we loved doing this as a family.

This week, Ashton was admitted to the hospital for a few days due to illness and unexplained fever. After 5+ weeks of radiation, her immune system was shot, and we were finally able to go home. **With all that has hit us over the past few months and knowing we will never live this life as we once knew it, shopping for a new Christmas tree was one of the few things we have gone out to do as a family.**

I really want to say thank you from the bottom of our hearts. This Christmas is going to be different than any of us have had before, but what we will always remember is being able to choose our new tree together. **Every year when we get the tree out to celebrate our favorite holiday, we will remember that the reason we were able to have such a beautiful tree is because of the generosity of Mattie Miracle and the big heart of our Ashton.** Your generosity has touched our lives forever, and I will never forget the smiles that you have already brought to Ashton, they mean everything these days.

**Interested in applying for a M&M Wish?
Click on the M&M Wishes logo to learn more.**



Delivering Cheer

Psychosocial gifts come in all forms, candy and snacks included. Thanks to you, over the past two weeks Mattie Miracle has been able to spread cheer around the National Capital region.

All the snack and candy items we received were donated and delivered! Our four Mattie Miracle Carts provide sweet treats, nutritional snacks, drinks, and toiletry items free of charge to families caring for children who are hospitalized. Families find it challenging to leave their child's hospital bedside to meet their own basic needs, therefore our Carts provide this much needed support. Thank you for making these psychosocial miracles possible.



Mattie Miracle Cancer Foundation
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