

## News & Updates

January 2023 | Volume 14 - Number 1

### Upcoming Activities

April, 2023  
12th Annual  
Toiletry Drive  
[Wish List](#)

May 21, 2023  
14th Annual  
[Virtual Walk](#)

### About Us

Spreading Hope  
Through  
Psychosocial  
Support <sup>SM</sup>

[Learn](#)

### Support

Help Make The  
Miracles Possible

[Donate](#)

CFC #59853



## Miracles in the New Year

Each December, Mattie Miracle invites you to support our Annual Drive. In 2022, our supporters collectively donated **\$23,000** to the Annual Drive. We are deeply grateful to have the generosity of our steadfast supporters who are willing to stand behind our psychosocial mission. This is our **14th year of service** to the childhood cancer community and we are thankful to you for making the Mattie Miracles possible.

**Over the last 14 years, together we have:**

1. Raised **over \$1M** to fund our Psychosocial Programs
2. Supported 35,000 children with cancer
3. Funded 5 **Child Life Specialists**
4. Awarded \$130,000 in psychosocial **Research Grants**
5. Published the first evidence based **Psychosocial Standards of Care**
6. Sponsored the publication of the **Matrix and Guidelines** to help implement the Psychosocial Standards of Care
7. Awarded 11 **M&M Wishes**
8. Funded 2 **Therapy Support Grants**
9. Operated 3 **Snack and Item Carts**, servicing over 2,500 families, delivering 26,000 snacks to in-patient families
10. Launched a non-profit research partnership with **The Andrew McDonough B+ Foundation** and **Momcology**. We are grateful to the B+ Foundation for their \$115,000 grant in support of our innovative implementation research project!

Giving

11. Introduced **House Resolution 262**
12. Added Psychosocial Language to the **STAR Act** (signed into law June 2018)

Click the heart for a listing of our supporters.

It's not just about  
the medicine!<sup>SM</sup>



Spreading Hope Through Psychosocial Support. <sup>SM</sup>

## 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.

### Hospital Isolation and Benefits of Social Interaction

Anyone who has ever been in a hospital can attest to the overwhelming isolation that can be felt. Typically, patients remain in the same room for days to week at a time. **For children diagnosed with cancer, this can even add up to months.** These long hospitalizations can be taxing on parents who often have to shuttle between siblings, work, or home. Parents may develop an alternating schedule between nights and days so that at least one parent can be with the child at all times. More recently, due to COVID-19 and RSV, most hospitals have limitations on visitors, whether it is the number of visitors allowed at a time or at all, the hours they can visit, and the age of visitors. **This usually means that siblings cannot visit and definitely not friends.** For children who spend the majority of their days with peers at school or camp or in the neighborhood, this can be devastating. **The monotony of the hospital sets in and children become withdrawn, sad, and angry. This is where child life steps in providing socialization in several ways.**

First, **child life specialists are a consistent presence for children in the hospital.** When I worked on the inpatient unit, I would visit my patients every day, spending hours in their rooms playing games, doing silly activities and providing much needed company. Parents could use this time to step out for a cup of coffee, take a phone call or a shower. I would use this time to assess how my patient was coping, what the child's understanding of the hospital is and more

importantly, learn about my patient as an individual. What do they like or dislike? What makes them smile? Do they like music? What is their favorite movie? These questions allow me to develop a strong rapport with my patients and help establish my role as a support person during their admissions. These consistent visits are crucial to my ability to understand the needs and nuances of each patient.

Second, **Child Life programs often feature a strong volunteer program.** Volunteers within a child life program are often child life students themselves, gaining valuable experience working with children in the hospital setting and giving of their time to make the hospital a more fun and normal place. Volunteers spend time playing with children in their rooms or in the playroom and develop strong relationships with the patients. My patients thrive on these interactions as it meant one-on-one time with a trusted adult whose sole focus was this child.

Third, **Child Life Specialists can play a key role in patients connecting with one another during long hospitalizations or during clinic visits.** When I have patients of a similar age or diagnosis, I would ask if the parents thought it would be helpful for their child to meet another child going through a similar experience. This would also give parents an opportunity to connect with another parent. Once both sides agreed to connect, I would invite them to a common area or share their contact information. During one admission, I had two teen patients who shared a wall connect over texting. This gave both of them a space to share what they were going through with someone who could understand their experience.

Over time, families would naturally find one another in the common areas of the children's hospital. These interactions would usually occur while I was playing with the children in the playroom or in the play space in the outpatient clinic. **Having designated play spaces for children is not only important to normalizing the hospital for children but also gives parents a neutral space to interact with one another.** Parents would connect and lift each other up during their children's treatment.

Fourth, **Child Life Specialists facilitate special events and visitors in the hospital.**

Although this has looked different since COVID-19, child life specialists have worked in creative ways to bring unique visitors to the hospital. At my hospital, we have been fortunate to have virtual visits with the Maryland Zoo, special programming from museums and musicians, interactive art activities from community groups and a popular virtual program, Hospital Bingo! Activities and programs like this allow children to engage with new faces and again, add exciting elements to their day.

**Socialization and interaction are developmental needs for children. Connecting with others help children learn, problem solve, think creatively and build their social-emotional skills.** Child Life Specialists strive to normalize the hospital in so many ways and socialization is at the top of the list.



## Funding Direct Support

Mattie Miracle is proud to have **funded Adina Levitan** (a full-time Child Life Specialist at Children's Hospital at Sinai in Baltimore, MD) **since 2018**. Adina understands that childhood cancer IS NOT JUST ABOUT THE MEDICINE, and we are grateful for her amazing energy, competence, and compassionate support she has provided children with cancer and their families over these four years.

Certified Child Life Specialists implement an array of play-based, coping-focused



techniques shown to ameliorate pain, lower anxiety, and reduce distress. **Children demonstrate fewer behavioral disturbances during and beyond medical encounters when receiving comprehensive preparation, procedural support, and coping skills education**, all of which are associated with accelerated healing.

In the three months, between April to June 2022, Adina directly assisted children and their families by performing **730 patient interventions**. These interventions fell within nine categories, and the percentages indicate the amount of time Adina performed each intervention.

Emotional Support - 19%  
Parent Support - 19%  
Normalization/Play - 19%  
Procedural Support - 14%  
Procedural Distraction - 14%  
Psychological Preparation - 7%  
Introduction to Services - 5%  
Sibling Support - 2%  
Therapeutic Play - 1%

## Calling all Supporters

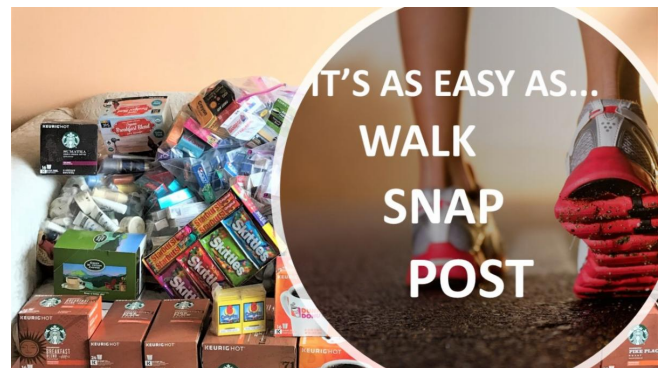
Looking for ways to get involved with Mattie Miracle? Participate in our **two upcoming virtual Community Events**:

- 1) Toiletry Item Drive (April 10, 2023)
- 2) Virtual Awareness Walk (May 21, 2023)

Our April Toiletry Drive helps to stock our **free snack and item carts** at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital (Washington, DC), Children's Hospital at Sinai (Baltimore, MD) and The Clinical Center at the National Institutes of Health (Bethesda, MD). Participating in our Annual Drive is easy. Check out our Amazon Wish List for specifics.

Don't miss our **14th Annual Virtual Walk!** The Walk raises funds to support our psychosocial programs and initiatives which assist children with cancer and their families.

Are you interested in sponsoring our Walk or want more information about creating a Walk team? **Contact us!**



Click on the image below for our  
Wish List.



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