



## News & Updates

January 2026 | Volume 17 - Number 1

### Upcoming Activities

April  
[Toiletry Drive](#)

May  
Awareness Walk

**About Us**  
Spreading Hope  
Through  
Psychosocial  
Support <sup>SM</sup>

[Learn](#)

**Support**  
Help Make The  
Miracles Possible

[Donate](#)

**CFC #59853**

[Giving](#)

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



## Annual Drive Success

Each December, Mattie Miracle invites you to support our Annual Drive. In 2025, **our supporters collectively donated \$17,000 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 17th year of service to the childhood cancer community, and we are thankful to you for making the Mattie Miracles possible.

### Over the last 17 years, together we have:

1. Raised over \$1.8M to fund our psychosocial programs
2. Supported 38,000 children with cancer
3. Funded 6 [child life specialists](#)
4. Awarded \$200,000 in psychosocial innovative [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 57 [M&M Wishes](#)
8. Funded 14 [Therapy Support Grants](#)
9. Operated five Snack & Item Carts at local hospitals
10. Donated millions of pieces of candy and toiletry items to families
11. Introduced [House Resolution 262](#)

12. Added Psychosocial Language to the STAR Act (signed into law June 2018)



16 Years of  
Service  
Video

Click on the image for a listing of our supporters.



## Spreading Hope Through Psychosocial Support.

SM

### Holiday Wishes



The M&M (Margy & Mattie) Wishes program is in memory of our board member, Margy Jost. This program provides grants up to \$1,000 to support a fun family activity, trip, or a wish list item for a child with cancer. **In December 2025, we awarded four holiday Wishes to children in Arizona, California, Maine, and Massachusetts, totaling \$4,000.**

#### The four Wishes were:

1. Trip to Branson, MO - Christmas Lights & Polar Express Train
2. Trip to Disneyland
3. Rental of a Cello and Cello Lessons
4. Trip to Niagara Falls, Canada

Since 2021, we have **awarded \$71,000 of M&M Wishes to children in 25 States.** Thank you for making these Wishes



## Child Life Corner with Adina Levitan, CCLS

### Supporting Children Throughout the Cancer Journey

The sight of a sign marked “Pediatric Hematology/Oncology” is likely at the top of the list of things parents never want to see in relation to their child. A parent who suspects that something is unwell with their child may not be prepared for what those three words can mean. **A journey of a cancer diagnosis typically begins in one of three places:** (1) the emergency department, where a strange injury or struggling organs are impacted by an unknown source; (2) the outpatient clinic, where a pediatrician refers their patient for concerning labs or lumps; or (3) the inpatient unit, where a steady stream of healthcare professionals introduce themselves alongside tests and scans. It can be nothing short of incredibly overwhelming.

**Child life specialists are trained to work wherever a child may be impacted, such as with a new or current diagnosis, a medical intervention, or other life change.** Often, we specialize in certain medical conditions or areas of personal interest and expertise. This space is where we wear many hats to support families through whatever they are facing. **For children with a diagnosis of cancer, our role begins from the moment they are admitted to the hospital, brought into the emergency department, or checked into the outpatient clinic.**

The scope of a child life specialist, at diagnosis, typically consists of the following important interventions to assess a child's coping, understanding and adjustment to the hospital.

1. **Building rapport and assessment** - before we can begin any interventions, a strong relationship must be established between the child and child life specialist. This foundation of trust allows a child life specialist to assess the child's needs, prepare them according to their understanding, and create a space that feels personal and safe. Building rapport typically has to happen quickly and also over time.
2. **Procedural preparation and support** - A diagnosis of cancer typically requires one or more diagnostic tests to establish the type and stage of cancer. For suspected blood disorders, this may be a blood test, a lumbar puncture, a bone marrow aspirate, a biopsy or a combination of these tests. Doctors may also order tests and scans such as biopsies, ultrasounds, MRIs, or CTs for solid tumors. Child life specialists utilize a technique called **“psychological preparation”** to prepare children for procedures. This means we are tailoring our preparation for a child's age and developmental understanding with appropriate teaching materials such

as real or pretend medical tools, pictures, books, models (like the Lego MRI model we previously shared in the November 2025 newsletter) or iPad apps. From there, we will be in the room for the test, scan or procedure, supporting the child through deep breathing, guided imagery, distraction or simply by being a quiet presence. In these spaces, we will also support the parents and advocate for how the parents can support their child.

3. **Diagnosis education** - once a clear diagnosis has been established, we now will introduce teaching to explain what is happening to the child's body. This can be done through drawings and books (such as **The Dot Method** by Kelsey Mora, CCLS, LCPC), hands-on learning (like **Blood Soup**) or dolls.
4. **Play and normalization** - Being in the hospital for any length of time can feel like entering a completely foreign world. The rooms are white and sterile; the machines make so many noises and there is a revolving door of nurses, doctors, students, social workers and more. The playroom is often the one space a child can relax. Many hospitals have clear signs that playrooms are "procedure-free zones," and only play can take place in that space. Child life specialists facilitate play and normalization through toys, games, special programming and events, parties and special visitors. **Through play, we can learn more about the child's coping and understanding of what they are experiencing. Through normalization, we can make the hospital feel a little less strange.**

A diagnosis of cancer can feel completely overwhelming. From navigating siblings at home, job schedules, missing work or school, insurance issues, lack of sleep and routine, and of course, supporting the child with cancer. **Parents can feel the weight of their child's diagnosis quickly and profoundly. Child life specialists help alleviate that burden by focusing on the child and their emotional needs and understanding, while giving families a space to plan for what is to come, knowing their child is not alone in this journey.**

## Get Involved

In honor of Mattie's 24th birthday, we will be hosting our **15th annual item drive**. All donated toiletries stock our **5 Mattie Miracle Snack & Item Carts** which offer **nutritional snacks, candy, and toiletries for free** to pediatric families 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).

**When living in a hospital 24 hours a day, seven days a week and caring for a child who is battling cancer, receiving these items can feel like a gift.** Families often rush to the hospital when their children are ill and are unable to pack basic items that are needed for daily care. The carts fulfill these psychosocial needs.

You can participate in our item drive from anywhere in the USA. Please view our Amazon wish list below, and help us keep our Mattie Miracle Carts stocked to support families caring for children with cancer. **Our**



**Carts service around 2,500 families a year.** We ask that all items be received by April 6, 2026.



Mattie Miracle Cancer Foundation  
is a GuideStar PLATINUM  
Participant Charity

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