

News & Updates

January 2025 | Volume 16 - Number 1

Upcoming Activities

April 7
Annual Drive

May 18
Virtual Awareness
Walk

About Us
Spreading Hope
Through
Psychosocial
Support SM

Learn

Support
Help Make The
Miracles Possible

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CFC #59853

Giving



A Miracle Annual Drive

Each December, Mattie Miracle invites you to support our Annual Drive. In 2024, our supporters collectively **donated \$26,000 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 16th year of service to the childhood cancer community, and we are thankful to you for making the Mattie Miracles possible.

Over the last 16 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 \$185,000 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 33 M&M Wishes
8. Funded 7 Therapy Support Grants

**It's not just about
the medicine!™**



**15th Anniversary
Video**

9. Delivered 26,000 snacks to in-patient families
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)

Click on heart for a listing of our supporters!



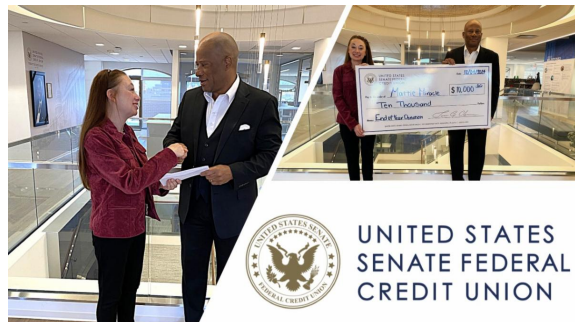
Spreading Hope Through Psychosocial Support.™

A Partner in Miracles

In December of 2022, the United States Senate Federal Credit Union (USSFCU) reached out to Mattie Miracle. We were requested to meet with the President and CEO, **Tim Anderson**. Mattie Miracle quickly learned that **USSFCU is a bank with a heart, who cares about making a meaningful impact on the community.**

The USSFCU experienced the death of several colleagues to cancer and their Board wanted to acknowledge this great loss by supporting the work of a reputable non-profit in the community. **We are grateful that USSFCU has chosen to partner with Mattie Miracle three years in a row.**

On December 4, 2024, Mattie Miracle accepted a **\$10,000 check** from Tim Anderson. We are grateful to partner with a bank that values the health, well-being, and quality of life of children with cancer and their families.



**UNITED STATES
SENATE FEDERAL
CREDIT UNION**



Child Life Corner with Adina Levitan, CCLS

Creating Positive Connections

Visiting a child with cancer in the hospital can be an emotional experience for friends and family, both kids and adults alike. Hospitals can feel intimidating, and the sight of a loved one undergoing treatment often amplifies the anxiety of visiting. **For children with cancer, these visits provide crucial connections and support during what can otherwise be an isolating time. To make these visits more comfortable and successful, child life specialists play a vital role in preparing both the patient and the visitors.**

Challenges of Visiting a Hospital

For many, a hospital is an unfamiliar and overwhelming environment. **Family members may feel nervous about seeing medical equipment, interacting with healthcare staff, or handling emotional reactions to the patient's condition.** Children may especially find it daunting to visit a peer or sibling, often unsure of what to say or do during the visit.

Additionally, since the COVID-19 pandemic, hospitals have enacted stricter visitor policies, such as limiting the number and age of visitors. This has created additional barriers, but creative adaptations have emerged to support social connections despite these challenges.

How Child Life Specialists Help

Child life specialists are experts in creating positive hospital experiences, and their skills are invaluable in facilitating successful visits for families and friends of children with cancer. Here are strategies they use:

1) Preparing Visitors

Before a visit, child life specialists may speak with friends and family to explain what to expect. They offer age-appropriate guidance on:

- The hospital environment (e.g., medical equipment and safety measures).
- Isolation needs, such as wearing a mask and gown; washing hands well and staying home if not feeling well.
- The child's current condition and any visible changes, such as hair loss or the use of IVs.
- Behavioral cues to watch for, such as fatigue or mood swings.

For younger visitors, child life specialists often use books, medical play, or visuals to demystify the experience. This preparation builds confidence and helps ease anxieties. Here are a few books that can be helpful for preparing for a hospital visit:

- **The Dot Method**: An Interactive Tool to Teach Kids About Cancer by Kelsey Mora, CCLS, LCPC
- **What Happens When a Kid Has Cancer** by Sara Olsher

- **What Happens When Someone I Love Has Cancer** by Sara Olsher
- **When a Kid Like Me Fights Cancer** by Catherine Stier
- **Caroline's Infusion Day by Kelly Brennan** (not specific to cancer however accurately represents a clinic visit for a child with cancer)

2) Facilitating Interaction

One of the most common concerns is how to interact with the child during the visit. Child life specialists suggest focusing on activities that promote connection and fun:

- Games and crafts: Having an activity to focus on can ease tension and make the visit enjoyable. Child life specialists might provide simple games, puzzles, or art supplies to spark engagement.
- Storytime or reading aloud: Sharing a favorite book can create a soothing and shared experience.
- Conversation prompts: For adults, suggesting questions about the child's favorite activities, movies, or plans can help guide meaningful interactions.

3) Icebreaker Activities

Sometimes, the initial moments of a visit can feel the most awkward. Child life specialists can facilitate creative icebreakers that help visitors relax and form a connection:

- Creating handmade cards together.
- Decorating a piece of the room, such as making colorful banners or window art.
- Joining in on a hospital-hosted activity like Hospital Bingo or a virtual zoo visit, which provides a natural context for engagement.

4) Providing a Comfortable Space

Child life specialists work to create environments where both patients and visitors feel at ease. A playroom or family lounge might be utilized for visits to provide a more relaxed setting. Specialists also coordinate times when visitors can join group activities, fostering connections in a way that feels less formal.

5) Supporting Emotions

Child life specialists are attuned to the emotional dynamics of hospital visits. They:

- Encourage visitors to acknowledge and validate the child's feelings without dwelling too much on their illness.
- Provide distraction tools or coping strategies if a child or visitor becomes emotional, such as stress balls, coloring, or guided breathing techniques.
- Support siblings and young friends in understanding their feelings about visiting and the patient's condition.

Ensuring Visits Are Meaningful

Not every visitor can physically come to the hospital, but child life specialists ensure connections remain strong:

- Virtual Visits: Video calls facilitated by child life staff allow patients to connect with family members or friends who cannot visit in person.
- Message Delivery: Notes, videos, and artwork from classmates or neighbors can be shared with the child, offering a tangible reminder of love and support.

The Impact of Thoughtful Visits

Child life specialists understand the profound impact visits can have on a child's well-being. **Thoughtful visits, whether in person or virtual, bring joy, foster connections, and help normalize the hospital experience.** By equipping visitors with tools, activities, and emotional support, child life specialists transform potentially intimidating encounters into opportunities for healing and connection.

In the end, visiting a child with cancer is not about saying or doing the perfect thing—it is about showing up and being present. With guidance from child life specialists, friends and family can feel empowered to bring comfort, joy, and love to the hospital room, reminding the child that they are never alone.

Spring Activities

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

- 1) **Toiletry Item Drive** (April 7, 2025)
- 2) **Virtual Awareness Walk** (May 18, 2025)

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 **16th Annual Virtual Walk**, on May 18! 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.





Mattie Miracle Cancer Foundation
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