

 CHOC  
*Dear Hospital*

In partnership with Dear World





## What is the Dear Hospital Program?

- An evidence-based storytelling initiative aimed at fostering empathy, understanding, and connection to our healthcare community
- Developed in collaboration with Dear World, the program incorporates guided reflective exercises, peer-to-peer sharing, and professional photography

## What is a Brain Tattoo?

- A short, meaningful phrase that captures the essence of someone's personal story
- Like a traditional tattoo that leaves a mark on the skin, a Brain Tattoo leaves a lasting emotional impression, representing a unique and powerful part of their journey
- These Brain Tattoos are then shared through a professional photograph, creating a visual representation of each story

## When and Where Can I Participate?

- **2-Hour Storytelling Sessions:** Can be scheduled throughout the year for team meetings, retreats, and special events (contact our team at [dearhospital@choc.org](mailto:dearhospital@choc.org) for more info)
- **Clinical Orientation:** New staff members engage in storytelling sessions during their orientation to connect with the organization's culture from the start
- **Quarterly Pop-Up Immersive Experiences:** On a quarterly basis, Dear Hospital stories will be featured in various locations, including the South Tower lobby of the Holmes Tower

Explore some of the stories within our walls



Denny

CT  
Technologist





## Tiffani

Mi4 Program Manager  
Medical Innovations



## Liv

CHOC Patient  
Teen & Young Adult (TYA)



**Emi**  
Child Life Specialist



**John**  
Safety & Security Officer



## La-Ti

Department Assistant  
Clinical Education & Professional Development



## Liz

Nurse Manager, Nights  
Surgical





**Pari**

Manager  
Health Sciences Administration



**Carmen**

Licensed Vocational Nurse  
Mental Health Inpatient Center



## Adrienne

Supervisor, Clinical Research Coordinator  
Thompson Autism and Neurodevelopmental Center



## Emma

Dietetic Technician  
Clinical Nutrition & Lactation





## Lida

Unit Assistant  
Cardiovascular ICU



## Jason

Assistant Nurse Manager, Nights  
Mental Health Inpatient Center



## Kenadee

RN  
Pediatric ICU



## Will

Patient Transporter  
PPC/Command Center





## Hannah

Clinical Staff Educator  
Cardiovascular ICU

## Dear Hospital,

**"It is not about how much you do, but how much love you put into what you do that counts. Life isn't worth living, unless lived for other people."**  
-Mother Teresa

Working in the healthcare field has been a dream of mine for as long as I can remember. I was the girl who received stethoscopes, human anatomy models, and anatomy encyclopedias for her birthday and Christmas. Ultimately, my decision to become a nurse stemmed from my desire to spend as much time with the patient and family as possible. The summer before the start of nursing school, I read a book where I read the quote above from Mother Teresa. That was it.

That is where my heart lies—entirely with the patients and their families. At CHOC, I was given this extraordinary opportunity to live for other people and to put as much love into my work as possible. The tasks I learned that mean the most to patients and families weren't the ones where I scanned the medication on time, took temperatures, or kept up with my charting. The tasks that had the most impact were the small ones: printing coloring pages, showing up when X-ray arrives with a hot cup of coffee, and making silly holiday cards with their child's footprints.

The small task in front of you can hold as much love as you give them. So, today, why not approach each small task with all the love you have? I can guarantee you'll never regret it.

With much love,

**DO SMALL THINGS WITH GREAT LOVE**

## Dear Hospital,

The time had finally arrived! Our 3-year-old daughter, Sienna, would begin her much-anticipated evaluation for her Individualized Education Plan (IEP). However, this time also coincided with her being in-patient, receiving IV chemotherapy. Despite our efforts to delay the process until she completed her treatment in four months, her educational team insisted that due to her age, the process was time-sensitive and needed to proceed.

Unfortunately, the evaluation was conducted under very challenging circumstances, as Sienna was experiencing fatigue, nausea, and physical discomfort due to the side effects from the chemotherapy she was receiving. The results of the evaluation led to Sienna's Initial IEP placing her in the most restrictive educational environment. Once she completed treatment and began school, we quickly noticed a significant regression in her social, emotional, and intellectual abilities after just one week in this academic setting.

At that point, we knew this was not the right environment for her. We called for a new evaluation that would include an Inclusion Specialist, School Psychologist, her Speech, Occupational, and Physical Therapists, along with in-coming district teachers and the principal. When we arrived at that second IEP meeting, everyone had Sienna's best interest in mind, and together, we created a plan that would meet Sienna's needs comprehensively.

It was in this moment that we recognized the importance of collaboration in solving complex issues. Working as a team was the only way our daughter's academic, social, emotional, and medical needs could be met. This experience has deeply impacted me both personally and professionally, reinforcing my belief in the power of teamwork.

With gratitude,

**TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK**



**Rubi**

CHOC Volunteer  
Child Psychotherapist and  
Mother of Three Beautiful Children





## Peyton

CHOC Patient  
Teen and Young Adult (TYA)

## Dear Hospital,

It's all part of God's plan for me.

**In February of 2021, my whole life changed in an instant.**

One day, I was at volleyball practice when I accidentally poked myself in the eye. I thought I was fine, but the days following I started developing symptoms. Over the next 2.5 weeks, I had a number of "episodes"; each one worse than the last. These episodes consisted of feeling like I was going to faint, vision changes, headache, numbness & tingling, and more. Eventually, I went to the E.R. & was diagnosed with Transverse Myelitis. I was treated in the hospital for 4 days, then was told I'd make a perfect recovery. But that did not happen. Since then, I've been diagnosed with a number of neurological & autoimmune diseases. I went from a perfectly healthy, very athletic girl, to a wheelchair user with constant debilitating symptoms.

While I questioned why the heck this happened to me & still do, I have come to realize that this has all been part of God's plan for me, & it has happened for the greater good.

This is my story. Thank you for taking the time to learn it & provide me with the best care throughout it all.

**IT'S ALL PART OF GOD'S PLAN!**

# Dear Hospital,

**Who is Wise? One who learns from everybody.**

"Yo, Mr. A, you cants be failing me, you're the coolest teacher I gots."  
"Paul, I am your 10th Grade English Teacher--I should fail you for that sentence alone. But dude, you showed up for one class the entire quarter, did you really think you were passing?"  
"Yo, Mr. A, your class is too early."

That simple exchange with a truant student outside the high school propelled my lifelong journey.

Paul wasn't showing up to class because it was his first class of the morning and as the eldest child in his family led by a single parent who worked early shifts, he was responsible for getting his younger siblings off to grammar school, which of course started later in the morning than high school. After a meeting with the Vice-Principal and a class swap with an afternoon study hall, remarkably, Paul transformed from failing his core English class to a solid B English student. Having put the work in to solve this problem, I was gratified and felt I earned the original fawning designation of "coolest teacher."

This watershed moment led me to pursue teaching with vigor, to become a doctor, (from the Latin, meaning teacher or teach), and to be a pediatrician, an adolescent medicine specialist, and a professor.

Teaching is much more than subject matter. Teaching is connection and connection is learning. Learning leads to better teaching and even more learning. Every experience is a teachable moment or a learning opportunity.

With gratitude for opportunity,

**LEARN TO TEACH AND TEACH TO LEARN**



**Dr. Adelman**

Medical Director  
Primary Care Network



## Allissa

RN  
Pediatric ICU

## Dear Hospital,

From a survivor into a fighter...

It all started with a beautiful project my manager, Alisa, came to me with one day: donating suitcases to all the children at Orangewood Children's Home. Orangewood is a temporary home for foster kids. Most of these kids usually lug their belongings from foster home to foster home in trash bags. Immediately, I knew we had to pull this together.

PICU partnered with CVICU and ER, and we donated enough suitcases, luggage tags, hygienic kits, Easter baskets, and blankets to every kid housed at Orangewood. The goal was for these kids to feel a sense of identity amid their instability. The project continues to bring tears to my eyes...doing the big drop-off of all the items brought memories of when my two biological sisters and I were foster kids at Orangewood. It was a full circle moment, being able to give back to these kids as a PICU nurse (my dream job) from CHOC (my dream hospital) to the kids that always hold a special place in my heart.

THE POWER OF WE was really the highlight of this experience and project. The power of all three units coming together to bring life to this project in just two months. It's now become something that we look forward to participating in every year. What it has also revealed is that...

THE POWER OF WE has been the managers who not only deeply care about their nurses and their well-being, but actively participate within our surrounding communities to give back to our pediatric population.

THE POWER OF WE has been the nurses who encouraged other nurses' light to shine, unafraid it would dim their own, and instead creating a culture of light and joy that elevated everyone to their most authentic and best selves.

And...THE POWER OF WE has been my family. It has been my parents' unwavering love and support for three little girls. It was my adoptive brother who ran around the elementary school playground telling everyone I was his real sister as I sat on the school benches in tears when we first joined our adoptive home. The power of we is my two biological sisters who have come out on top of the foster care statistics, leading beautiful lives in their own ways.

THE POWER OF WE has turned little Allissa from a survivor...into a fighter.

With gratitude,

## THE POWER OF WE

# Dear Hospital,

A very simple, yet powerful question to contemplate: Could one SMILE actually make a difference?

It was June 2005, when my whole world was about to change. My father had been rushed to the intensive care unit. He had been suffering from Pulmonary Fibrosis for almost 10 years. My siblings and I spent hours with my dad at his bedside. I remember it being late in the evening, when I had to leave...and I looked around the room. It was cold and dismal, with machines beeping constantly. The room didn't "feel" right to me. The next day, I was determined to change the room. No flowers or plants are allowed, so I decided to bring balloons—a bunch of balloons with one yellow happy face balloon. I tied them to the footboard of my dad's hospital bed so he could easily see them.

The following day, my dad said, "Diana, I woke up at 2 in the morning, and I was lonely...then I saw that happy face balloon smiling back at me, and I was ok."

I went to the nurse's station to get an update on him...and two different nurses told me that he was slowly getting worse. They also told me that he was always talking about the smiling happy face balloon!

A couple of days later, we said our final goodbyes to our dad. My world would never be the same. So many questions arose. So many decisions needed to be made and planning needed to take place.

My siblings decided that we would talk with the priest and make arrangements after 8:00 AM morning Mass. The next morning came, and I dreaded getting out of bed and going to Mass. The same Morning Mass that my dad had attended Daily since 1986. After the Mass was over, I remember clearly...I was kneeling in the pew. I looked up...to the highest peak of the church's steeple....and there ....was a yellow happy face balloon. How?! HOW was there a happy face balloon INSIDE the church?! I had NEVER seen any type of balloon inside the church, much less a happy face balloon. After Mass we waited for the priest, and my dad's friends greeted us and gave their condolences. One of my dad's friends came up to me and said, "Did you SEE that smiling balloon in church? It reminded me of your dad. He was always smiling!" Confirmation. Now what was I going to do with this confirmation? How was I going to share it? How could I make something good out of the saddest time in my life?

In 2007, I was a faithful volunteer for St. Joseph's Hospital. I decided that more people needed a smiling happy face balloon. So, I started a program. I bought the happy face balloons wholesale and would get a list of patients that "needed a smile." I passed them out every time I volunteered. Patients were grateful and often shared their own stories about how one smile can change a person's WHOLE day. I knew it was a nice thing to do...but could a smile on a balloon, and a smile on MY face change another person's WHOLE day??!!

Years have gone by....and it never fails... when I am having a hard day, or learned of sad news...Fate puts a yellow happy face balloon in my path somehow...or a total stranger will give me a smile. The answer has been and will always be: YES! A SMILE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

It doesn't cost anything. It's not hard to do, and you never know whose day will be changed...from a SMILE.

With joy,

## A SMILE IS FREE



Diana  
Monitor Tech  
Emergency Department





**Kenny**

CHOC Patient  
Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Oncology

## Dear Hospital,

Before being a part of AYA, I relapsed and, as a result, I became wheelchair bound. I spent 18 months admitted and didn't socialize as much as I wanted to. I often felt like I was missing out. I spent so much time locked inside while the world was moving on without me.

But, because I'm funny, I managed to make a lot of friends at AYA. One instance of this was during one of my first events. We were playing LCR I believe, or some game that required counting. I met a girl named Kayla who talked to me about how she's an econ major. As we're playing, she miscounts, and I joke about how ironic it is that an econ major can't count. Which she thought was funny - as did I.

**AN ECON MAJOR CAN'T COUNT!!**

