

# LEADERS IN care

STORIES OF THE MOST AMAZING CARE ANYWHERE

SUMMER 2025

## Strength in Motion

Shriners Children's rehabilitation  
teams transform lives



**Shriners**  
Children's™





### OUR MISSION

At Shriners Children's™, our three-part mission has one goal: to change and improve lives. We do this by caring for our patients, conducting research to gain knowledge and develop new treatments, and providing educational opportunities for physicians and other healthcare professionals.



### WHO DO WE TREAT?

Children under age 18 may receive care and treatment when there is a reasonable possibility they could benefit from the specialized services we offer. All services are provided regardless of a family's ability to pay or insurance status.



### WHAT ARE OUR PEDIATRIC SPECIALTIES?

- + Treatment for orthopedic conditions
- + Burn care
- + Spinal cord injury rehabilitation and management
- + Cleft lip and palate care



### GROUNDBREAKING RESEARCH

We strive to discover answers that will one day improve lives. Our innovative researchers have made significant breakthroughs in all four of our service lines, improving patient care and adding to the global body of medical knowledge.



### CONTINUING EDUCATION

One way we help improve the lives of children worldwide is by offering educational opportunities to medical professionals. We maintain relationships with several medical teaching facilities, and our clinicians are known for sharing their experience and knowledge with other medical communities.



### THE SHRINERS FRATERNITY

Shriners International, a fraternity based on fun, fellowship and the Masonic principles of brotherly love, relief and truth, founded Shriners Children's as its official philanthropy in 1922. What began as one hospital is now a world-renowned healthcare system with locations in three countries. The fraternity, which has approximately 200 chapters in several countries and thousands of clubs around the world, continues to support this unique healthcare system. To learn more, please visit [shrinersinternational.org](https://shrinersinternational.org).

## COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Dear Readers,



At Shriners Children's, we're always striving to bring the best care to the children we serve. We challenge ourselves to grow and improve. Our nurses, doctors

and staff embrace a culture of curiosity and excellence, always asking, "How can we do even more?" We are rooted in our mission to serve children and change lives.

I'm certain that is what was reflected in the *Forbes* poll that named Shriners Children's as America's Best Midsize Employer for 2025 out of the nearly 500 entrants considered.

Caring for children – especially those with complex medical needs – is not just what we do; it's who we are, and we are very good at it. This recognition reaffirms

what we've always known: Shriners Children's is a truly special place powered by the smartest, most compassionate and most dedicated professionals in healthcare.

So, YES – we take immense pride in our workplace. We love sharing our mission and celebrate every opportunity to say, "I work at Shriners Children's, where we provide the Most Amazing Care Anywhere."

I hope – I believe – that when our families walk through our doors, they feel that this place means as much to us as it does to them.

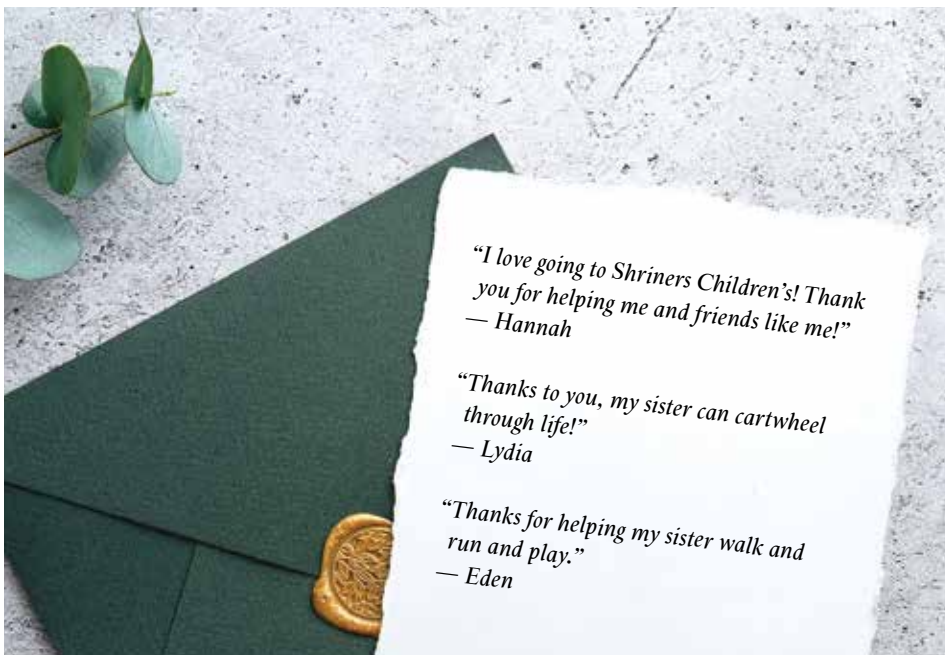
I invite you to enjoy this issue's many stories of hope, healing and life-changing care. I wish you and your family a fun and fulfilling summer.

Sincerely,

Mel Bower  
Chief Marketing and Communications Officer  
Shriners Children's

## PATIENT PERSPECTIVES

Staff at Shriners Children's St. Louis were deeply moved by a heartfelt surprise from a patient named Hannah and her sisters, Lydia and Eden. The trio wrote thoughtful notes thanking their care team for the kindness, comfort and support shown during Hannah's treatment. It's moments like these – filled with gratitude and connection – that remind us why we're here.



SUMMER 2025

# Contents

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 4 Awards Recognize Data-Driven Advancements
- 4 Who's Forbes' Best Midsize Employer?



## EXPERTISE & EXCELLENCE

- 5 Strength in Motion
- 8 'Blazing' Through Rehab
- 8 Restoring Comfort and Confidence



## CHAMPIONS IN HEALING

- 9 Game On! Sports Medicine in Action
- 12 Kid Powers Activate!
- 14 Laykin Strong



## SYSTEMWIDE STRENGTH

- 15 Expanding Access

## SHINING STARS

- 19 A Journey of Resilience

 **VISIT US ONLINE** to find more stories like these at [myleadersincare.com](https://myleadersincare.com).

**ON THE COVER:** Shriners Children's Portland patient Brantley deftly wields a bo staff.



# Awards Recognize Data-Driven Advancements

Shriners Children's has again been recognized as one of healthcare's standout organizations for our high standards in patient experience, employee experience, safety and quality. Press Ganey honored our healthcare system with an impressive 12 Human Experience Awards for 2024, celebrating data-driven advancements in healthcare at seven locations. The awards reflect how families feel they are cared for and the quality of care they believe they receive.

"Providing the highest-quality care and the best experience is our top priority," said Chief Medical Officer Fran Farley, M.D. "This includes safe, high-quality, patient- and family-centered care delivered by our engaged and resilient healthcare teams across the system. I'm very proud to work for an organization that prioritizes and excels in the quality, safety, and experience of our patients and families."

Working with more than 41,000 healthcare facilities, Press Ganey conducts nationwide surveys of patients, physicians, and other provider employees to assess their experience, satisfaction and engagement. The healthcare consultant also compares the clinical quality performance of select hospitals and clinics.

2024  
HX Guardian  
of Excellence  
Award®

PressGaney

2024  
HX Pinnacle  
of Excellence  
Award®

PressGaney

Shriners Hospitals for Children Canada earned three Press Ganey awards. Earning two awards were Shriners Children's Chicago, Shriners Children's Ohio and Shriners Children's Greenville.

Shriners Children's Boston, Shriners Children's Hawai'i and Shriners Children's Philadelphia each took home one award.

In addition, six Shriners Children's locations were acknowledged in the workforce experience categories, demonstrating our organization's commitment to supporting our employees who provide the most amazing care anywhere.

## Who's Forbes' Best Midsize Employer? We Are!

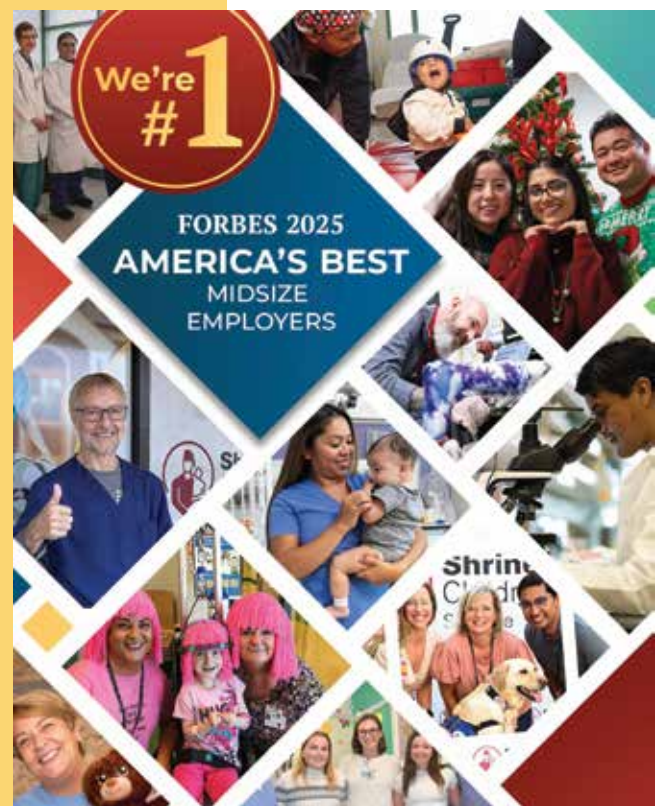
Shriners Children's was named the top midsize employer for 2025 by *Forbes* and Statista R in a survey they have been conducting and publishing for 10 years.

"This organization is proud that our employees feel that Shriners Children's attends to their needs and allows them to give to the best of their ability," said Chief Medical Officer Fran Farley, M.D. "We know that when people contribute to others the way our people do, they feel fulfilled. That goes a long way toward accounting for this award."

This year *Forbes* and Statista surveyed 217,000 employees and ranked 498 midsize companies, defined as those having between 1,000 and 5,000 employees.

"Our employees go above and beyond every day and make incredible contributions to improving children's lives with their passion, commitment to excellence, and pursuit of new and innovative technologies in healthcare," added Kathy Dean, vice president of human resources. "We are extremely proud of this recognition, which highlights our talented and dedicated workforce."

This is the third time Shriners Children's has been recognized in this *Forbes* ranking. Last year, Shriners Children's was 12th among midsize employers.





**expertise**  
& EXCELLENCE

SPECIALTY CARE FUELED BY INNOVATION & RESEARCH

# Strength IN MOTION

*Shriners Children's rehabilitation teams are transforming lives, one achievement at a time*

“**W**e have been *everywhere* for therapy, and Shriners Children's is the best in the world. Luciana's therapist, Jennifer, is the first person we have made progress with; Luciana is thriving,” said Stacy, mother of Shriners Children's Lexington patient Luciana. >>

*Luciana, 9, has been coming to Shriners Children's Lexington since she was 2.*



Stacy and Luciana, now 9, have been coming to Shriners Children's Lexington for treatment since Luciana was 2. Luciana has cerebral palsy and a related genetic disorder. For the past three years, mother and daughter have been coming to the clinic weekly.

For patients like Luciana, occupational and physical therapists at Shriners Children's do more than provide treatment – they change lives. Committed to helping children achieve their fullest potential, these dedicated professionals use innovative, patient-centered approaches to make a difference in their lives.

### Path to independence: Therapy in action

Occupational and physical therapy (OT/PT) teams treat a wide range of orthopedic conditions, including scoliosis, sports injuries, developmental delays, sensory processing challenges and postsurgical rehabilitation. They also assist children with splinting, prosthetics, and custom assistive devices like wheelchairs or gait trainers.

Amy Dail, PT, DPT, a physical therapist with 12 years of experience and more than a decade at Shriners Children's Lexington, explains the distinction between the two therapy fields.

"Physical therapy is more focused on gross motor/mobility-related skills – those bigger movements like walking, running, doing stairs," said Dail, who manages the rehab department. "Occupational therapy focuses on meaningful daily activities such as bathing, dressing, eating and fine motor skills. Together, we help our patients with all areas of their daily lives."

### Therapists turn hard work into playtime

Working with children takes a special skill set, says Lauren Eckerle, SLP, director of rehabilitation services at Shriners Children's Chicago. "Every therapy session is a carefully crafted mixture of science, creativity and play," she said. "Adults in therapy can follow straightforward instructions like, 'Step side to side with a band around your legs.' Kids often need a different approach."

Eckerle manages a team of over 20 physical therapists, occupational therapists and speech-language pathologists who handled more than 17,000 rehab visits last year at the Chicago location. Their practice is growing, with a 9% increase in outpatient rehabilitation in 2024 compared with 2023.

Kids often require engagement, motivation and, most important, fun. "Pediatric therapists are experts in getting kids to do hard things without them realizing it," explained Eckerle. "You can't just instruct a younger child to perform an exercise. If you say, 'You're stuck in the ocean! The sharks are chasing you! Go! Go!' the child is moving, laughing and working toward their goals without even realizing it."

This creative approach is bolstered by an ever-growing assortment of therapy tools – plastic sharks, obstacle courses and themed games. "In pediatric rehab, progress occurs in moments of laughter, adventure and play," said Eckerle.

### A team of specialists with a heart for kids

The team at Shriners Children's Lexington consists of five physical therapists and three occupational therapists, all of whom bring a wealth of expertise to their patients. The team's collaborative

*Luciana, 9, is doing things her mother, Stacy, never thought possible, including gymnastics.*



approach ensures that each child receives individualized, holistic treatment. “All of our therapists have a passion for treating children, no matter their specialty or strength,” Dail explained.

As for Luciana, Stacy said her daughter can now do things they never thought possible, including riding a bike and competing in Special Olympics gymnastics. Luciana loves her weekly sessions, including practicing her gymnastics routines for a recent competition in Atlanta.

“I won eight medals,” she said with a smile. “Five were first place!”

### Building strength step by step

Sometimes, rehabilitation is about putting one foot in front of the other. At Shriners Children’s Mexico, physical activity is more than just exercise – it’s essential for

independence and well-being. The physical therapy team organizes walking groups to help children develop the skills they need for daily life.

Physical therapist Jonás Lugo explained, “We prepare patients for real-world challenges like climbing stairs and walking on uneven surfaces by recreating street structures.”

Many children in the walking group have cerebral palsy, but any child needing to improve balance, coordination or walking mechanics can benefit. “Walking isn’t just about movement,” Lugo noted. “It’s also about balance, coordination and awareness of your surroundings, helping kids feel more secure in daily life.”

To keep sessions engaging, therapists design fun and challenging obstacle courses using cones, hoops, tunnels, mats and balls. “The idea is for kids to exercise while having fun,” Lugo said. This playful approach makes rehabilitation an engaging and positive experience.

Family involvement is a key factor in success. “We encourage parents to replicate the exercises at home,” Lugo added. “When they do, the child’s improvements in strength, speed and rhythm are remarkable.”

Beyond therapy, the walking groups foster friendships between patients and therapists. “They exercise together, celebrate accomplishments and form a special community,” Lugo shared. These

sessions create an environment of support, motivation and joy, making rehabilitation a truly transformative journey.

### Swallow studies go high-tech

For some families, a child’s ability to eat and swallow safely is a key concern when seeking rehabilitation therapy services. Speech-language pathologists perform comprehensive feeding evaluations for infants and older children. In 2024, Shriners Children’s Chicago expanded its care to include video swallow studies.

These specialized studies utilize a moving X-ray known as fluoroscopy to capture real-time images of how food and liquids of various textures travel through a child’s mouth, throat and esophagus. Swallowing difficulties can occur so quickly in real time that high-quality video review is essential. The hospital has invested in new technology, a TIMS Medical Video Platform™, to deliver diagnostic-quality recordings. This tool instills families with the confidence that feeding or drinking issues in a child are being evaluated using the most advanced technology available.

The study may show whether the child is at risk of aspiration, telling parents and providers whether it is safe for some patients with various neurological and neuromuscular conditions to eat or drink by mouth. A rehabilitation physician and therapist carefully observe the process and, after reviewing it, can better identify any challenges and determine strategies to support the child’s feeding and nutrition.

### A lasting impact

For therapists at Shriners Children’s, the greatest reward is witnessing children achieve goals they once thought were impossible.

“Success is different for every kid and family. What is success for one patient may not be for another, and that is what makes our jobs so engaging,” Dail said. “Seeing a child meet a goal they did not think they could meet is probably the best part – to watch them realize ‘I can do this. I can do hard things.’”

Through expertise, compassion and innovation, Shriners Children’s therapists continue to make a profound difference – one patient at a time. 🧡

Physical therapist Jonás Lugo helps patient Cristofer work on strength and balance.





# ‘Blazing’ Through Rehab

*Lighting the way to recovery at Shriners Children’s Hawai‘i*

If you’ve never heard of BlazePods before, you might assume they’re high-tech fire starters, turbo-charged espresso shots or maybe even a group of thrill-seeking dolphins with a flair for fireworks. But in reality, BlazePods are a light-based training system designed to boost agility, coordination and strength, making workouts or rehab sessions feel more like a high-energy game than hard work.

At Shriners Children’s Hawai‘i, these glowing little pods are helping patients recover after surgery by turning rehabilitation into an interactive, engaging experience.

“We are fortunate to have access to cutting-edge technology to enhance rehabilitation and keep our patients motivated,” said Michele Chee, PT, DPT, director of rehabilitation services at Shriners Children’s Hawai‘i. “Our virtual reality system supports exercises for both upper and lower extremities, and we also use the BlazePod system to

improve reaction time, speed, balance and coordination. Patients can enhance their upper and lower extremity range of motion, strength and balance while fully immersed in an engaging, interactive environment.”

## How does it work?

Picture this: While wearing a headset, patients see an avatar that moves as if it were their own body. They tap brightly lit targets with their hands or feet, often while holding challenging positions like a plank, balancing on one leg or engaging in another core-strengthening challenge. The pods respond instantly, lighting up in unpredictable patterns to keep participants moving.

Sensors attached to the patient’s arms and/or legs track their movements. Therapists can tailor the game settings so the play experience matches each patient’s needs, adjusting the difficulty level to optimize progress and achieve better functional outcomes.



## Patients get their game on

BlazePods and virtual reality technology have transformed therapy at Shriners Children’s Hawai‘i, making it as fun as it is effective. Kids aren’t just doing exercises – they’re playing and pushing their limits, all while building strength, improving balance, and boosting muscle memory.

The best part? When rehab feels like play, patients blaze down the road to recovery – one pod at a time. 🏁

# Restoring Comfort and Confidence

*Shriners Children’s New England offers comprehensive biofeedback therapy for kids with bladder issues*

Topics like constipation and incontinence can be embarrassing for children to talk about, making it challenging for families to seek solutions.

At Shriners Children’s New England, pediatric urologists diagnose and treat conditions of the bladder, urinary tract, kidney and genitalia for boys and girls from birth to early adulthood. They talk with the child to put them at ease and get them to open up about their problem.

The highly trained biofeedback therapy team assists patients facing issues related to pelvic floor dysfunction. They use mind-body techniques to help patients learn to better control the muscles that regulate bladder and bowel function. Biofeedback therapy and targeted lifestyle changes can help patients resolve

symptoms and achieve long-term success. To that end, most patients first undergo an electromyography (EMG) uroflow test, which provides information about activating their pelvic floor muscles and bladder function.



*The biofeedback therapy team*

“If a patient’s pelvic floor muscles function abnormally when they empty their bladder, it indicates that they need help with relaxation. If a patient has weak pelvic floor muscles and experiences leaking during activities like running and jumping, we know they need assistance with strengthening. Often, kids require both,” explained Caryn France, MSPT, manager of outpatient therapy services at Shriners Children’s New England.

Therapists teach children to control their muscles by instructing them to pull muscles up and in, as well as raise and lower them like an elevator.

Family support is crucial to each patient’s overall success. “Therapy provides the tools, but families, particularly the patients, need to engage in the work to achieve lasting improvement,” said France. 🏡



# champions

IN HEALING

EMPOWERING PATIENTS, FAMILIES & CARE TEAMS

## Game On!

*Sports medicine specialists  
support young athletes*



**W**hen Mason, 16, stepped back onto the soccer field this spring, his confident stride told the story of successful recovery. After struggling with severe lower back pain that threatened to sideline him permanently, he found help through the sports medicine program at Shriners Children's Shreveport. His journey represents just one of thousands of success stories emerging from Shriners Children's expanding sports medicine initiatives across North America. >>



*Mason was able to get back to soccer and the other sports he enjoys after rehabilitative therapy in the sports medicine program at Shriners Children's Shreveport.*

As one of North America's largest pediatric orthopedic healthcare systems, Shriners Children's brings a unique perspective to treating young athletes.

"Pediatric sports-related injuries are fundamentally different because kids are still growing," explained Damian Duhon, PT, DPT, manager of therapy services at Shriners Children's Shreveport. "You have to consider growth plates and numerous other factors that don't come into play with adults."

This expertise drives innovation across Shriners Children's. In response to a growing demand by patients for specialized sports injury treatment, Shriners Children's Shreveport expanded its care options to include pediatric sports medicine, unveiling a new rehabilitation gym last November. This initiative increases access to high-quality, child-focused sports care for young athletes across northwest Louisiana and surrounding regions.

The new gym features sport-specific training areas that include hitting nets, basketball hoops and a specialized turf surface where athletes can practice game-like movements.

### Collaborative care in action

Shriners Children's Spokane is another location that offers a comprehensive, collaborative approach that sets new standards for youth sports medicine. The facility's multidisciplinary team includes community and clinic-certified athletic trainers, sports medicine physicians and physical therapists – all working together to bring the best sports medicine care to young athletes.

"We all work together as an amazing sports medicine team," said athletic trainer Nate Leu. "We couldn't do our jobs without one another to share ideas and help advocate for our student-athletes to get the proper care they need."

This collaborative approach proves particularly effective in complex cases. Take Mason's story: When back pain began affecting his soccer performance, a thorough evaluation ruled out the progression of his mild scoliosis. Instead, his physical therapist identified weak core muscles as the primary issue. Through a carefully structured program of hip bridges, planks, and balance exercises,

Mason gradually rebuilt his strength and stability. Today, he's back to playing the sport he loves, armed with knowledge about maintaining his body's strength and preventing future injuries.

Chief Medical Officer Fran Farley, M.D., emphasized the importance of specialized pediatric care: "The rising number of young athletes in sports has led to an increase in injuries that require different treatment approaches than similar adult injuries. We deliver care in a way that makes each child feel safe, valued and respected in a patient-centered environment."

Shriners Children's commitment to comprehensive sports medicine care extends beyond traditional treatment. In Spokane, community athletic trainers can be found on the sidelines, providing prevention training and real-time injury care. The clinic's physical therapists offer specialized evaluations – from isolated strength assessments to landing and jumping analyses – ensuring athletes safely return to play at their optimal capacity.

### Expanding care for young athletes

This expansion of services across the Shriners Children's healthcare system represents more than just new facilities or programs – it's a commitment to understanding and addressing the unique needs of young athletes. That can take place through presurgical rehabilitation to optimize outcomes, concussion treatment protocols or injury prevention education. The focus remains on helping kids reach their full potential safely.

As youth sports participation continues to grow, Shriners Children's stands ready to meet the increasing demand for specialized care. Our approach combines cutting-edge facilities, highly trained staff and a deep understanding of pediatric sports medicine to create programs that truly serve young athletes' needs. From the soccer fields of Shreveport, Louisiana, to the training rooms of Spokane, Washington, we're helping kids like Mason return to the sports they love – stronger, safer and better prepared for success. 🏆



*From the sidelines to center court – Shriners Children's sports medicine teams help young athletes return to the games they love.*





***“We help advocate for our student-athletes to get the proper care they need.”***

— NATE LEU, SHRINERS CHILDREN’S SPOKANE



## Splash, Snack and Shine!

Summer break is a wonderful opportunity for children to create new memories on family vacations or at camps with friends. It’s that time of year when children are most physically active, which is great. However, it can present challenges for children living with a limb difference or visible burn injury.

We asked those in the know at Shriners Children’s Ohio what parents can do to make summer as successful as possible.

They said:

**Flood ‘em!** Registered dietitians Elena Smith and Christina Sunderman said having children take regular breaks from playing to cool down and drink is a good idea. They recommended having juicy snacks on hand, like watermelon, strawberries, cantaloupe, tomatoes, cucumber and celery. Preparing water infused with fresh fruit is a great tip, as it adds flavor, which encourages drinking more.

**Slather ‘em!** Sunscreen needs to be applied every 90 minutes, using a sunscreen with 30 SPF or higher, said Emily Burke, RN, a burn nurse. That’s especially important for burn survivors with grafted skin, which is more susceptible to sunburn. When you can, have extra sunscreen around because it can easily get left behind at the pool, park or the beach.

**Reassure ‘em.** Wearing shorts and bathing suits can be fraught for children with limb differences or burn scars. Certified child life specialists Michelle Smith and Sarah O’Neal said the initial step in helping children feel more at ease is to acknowledge their feelings of anxiety or vulnerability. “Awkward situations and questions will come up,” Smith said. “So, it’s normal for them to feel apprehensive.” O’Neal added that parents should empower children to share only what makes them comfortable.

**Prepare ‘em.** “The key to a successful summer is preparation,” explained Burke. “Parents can practice responses with their children,” she said. “Another child may ask what happened or why they look a certain way. You and your child can come up with an answer they feel good about, like ‘I got hurt, but I am better now.’” Anticipating situations or needs ahead of time can make a big difference that helps minimize surprises so you can focus on having fun as a family.



# Kid Powers Activate!

*Shriners Children's is finding ways to let kids with disabilities fully access the power of playtime activity*

Eric Smith, CP, a prosthetist at Shriners Children's Northern California, has a story he tells about a 14-year-old patient, Micah, with a lower leg prosthesis.

One day, during a fitting, Micah mentioned that, just once, he wanted to beat his cousin in a race.

That's interesting, thought Smith, a little surprised. "How old is your cousin?" he asked.

"He's 7."

Smith suddenly realized there was more he could be doing for his patients.

"I started wondering if function follows form here – whether your physical makeup determines who you decide you are and what you put your energy into," Smith said. "Being an amputee can make it harder to be active. So, it would make sense if you tend to gravitate away from physical activity."

But children want to play and be active and physical. It's in their nature.

The convention in pediatric prosthetics had been to give a child the simplest lower-leg prosthesis because it was easier to walk on during day-to-day activities. The child was moved up to a sportier model only if they expressed a desire.

But after his conversation with Micah, Smith decided to change this practice, and he has followed suit with many of his patients over the years. He gives children the option to choose a running prosthesis first; they can always "slow down" later.

Smith fitted the 14-year-old with a more athletic, blade-like foot that "you could run a marathon on."

One month later, Micah beat his cousin in a running contest.

"I listen, support and encourage kids to try new things, and then provide a prosthetic that helps them be active and is right for them," said Smith. "Many times, they surprise themselves with their hidden abilities to move."

## Opportunities in motion

At one time, the need for individuals with physical limitations to be active was sometimes overlooked. But now, physicians and physical therapists stress the importance of appropriate physical activity for those with physical challenges.

The public's interest in seeing people excel and compete was evidenced by the prominence of the Paralympic Games last summer. Shriners Children's had nearly 20 former patients participate in the Paris Paralympics, including Hunter Woodhall, who won a gold medal in the 400M T62, and the youngest member of the U.S. wheelchair rugby team, 18-year-old Zion.

The AmSmithan Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children ages 6–17 get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily. Doctors also recommend that kids do an activity that strengthens their bones and muscles at least three days a week. This is a recommendation that clinicians across Shriners Children's take seriously.



*Playtime is job No. 1! From left: Veronica, 11, uses a hand-cycle for her playtime "commute;" Sean Paul, 7, smiles from the pickleball court; Sebastian, 8, high fives on the links; Michelle, 8, plays wheelchair pickleball; and Harley, 16, takes swing at adaptive golf.*





## Power of play

At Shriners Children's Hawai'i, integrating play and physical activity into a child's rehabilitation is an important component of ensuring their overall well-being, said Helene Freni-Rogers, CTRS, manager of recreation therapy. "Physical activity not only releases endorphins to lift a child's mood, but it can also improve sleep, brain function, and weight control, and boost energy and self-esteem."

With great weather year-round in Hawai'i, patients can enjoy the outdoor spaces around the hospital campus, including playing adaptive tennis and participating in the nationwide pickleball craze during weekly classes. The hospital also has a new junior tennis court and pickleball play area right on the grounds, where local pickleball club members

**"Whether the kids could stand or used wheelchairs or crutches, they all participated!"**

— HELENE FRENI-ROGERS, CTRS

volunteer to retrieve balls and engage in friendly games with the children.

In fact, national pickleball champion Steve Cole and his wife, Valerie, visited Shriners Children's Hawai'i last year to offer a few pointers on the court. "It didn't matter whether the kids could stand or used wheelchairs or crutches," said Freni-Rogers. "They all participated, and their smiles were priceless!"

## Creative outdoor programs

The recreational therapy department at Shriners Children's Chicago also offers creative activities to help patients get outside and stay active as part of their care or rehabilitation, including monthly adaptive golf workshops and weekly garden-related fun in horticultural therapy.

Patients learn skills and techniques, as well as how golf can inspire. "Participating in adaptive golf improves balance, hand-eye coordination and endurance. It builds strength and can be enjoyed by anyone, regardless of their abilities," said Darlene Kelly, director of recreational therapy at Shriners Children's Chicago.

The program includes an adaptive golf cart, if needed, that features a rotating

seat, allowing patients to swing from either a seated or semi-standing position based on their medical conditions.

Another way to enjoy the outdoors and stay active at Shriners Children's Chicago is a weekly opportunity to dig in the dirt or create something beautiful during horticultural therapy programs in partnership with the Chicago Botanic Garden. The one-hour group activities allow patients to learn new skills or regain lost ones and may also enhance memory and cognitive abilities. In addition, gardening in the hospital's backyard green spaces benefits patients by helping them improve coordination and balance.

## Empowering kids to move

So, how does a parent encourage their child to be physically active?

Shriners Children's caregivers say parents should be open-minded and look for opportunities. Their children may have to try many activities before they discover the one that excites and motivates them.

Given the right equipment and opportunities, children with physical challenges can explore new worlds of exercise, sports and competition. It's all part of the Shriners Children's mission to give kids the belief they can achieve their dreams and the tools they need to start reaching. 🏆





Orthotist Becky Suddaby works with Laykin, checking her ankle braces.



# Laykin Strong

*Full of spirit, Laykin displays plenty of pep and resilience for herself and for her school cheer squad*

Quirky. Ambitious. Independent. Resilient.

Four words that perfectly describe Laykin, 10, a spirited and determined patient at Shriners Children's Philadelphia.

In February 2024, Laykin's world changed in an instant. A motor vehicle accident left her with a lower thoracic spinal cord injury, paralyzing her from the waist down. For any child and their family, an injury such as this would feel overwhelming. Would Laykin have believed that by the time summer rolled around she would be walking again using custom-made braces?

If you ask anyone who knows her, the answer is: absolutely.

## Custom-made orthotics: A step toward mobility

Laykin first came to Shriners Children's Philadelphia for spinal cord rehabilitation during the summer of 2024, and from day 1, Laykin's care team at Shriners Children's Philadelphia was committed to helping her regain as much independence as possible. Bethany Lipa, M.D., director of physical medicine and rehabilitation, designed a personalized rehabilitation plan that included intensive physical and occupational therapy, along with custom orthotics created by the in-house Pediatric Orthotic and Prosthetic Services (POPS) team.

Certified orthotist Becky Suddaby, MSPO, (L)CO, worked closely with Laykin and her family to design custom bilateral ankle-foot orthoses and hip-knee-ankle-foot orthoses. These specialized braces provide stability and alignment, allowing Laykin to stand and walk with a walker. To make her braces even more special, Laykin customized her color choices to show off her personal favorite – pink.

## Rehabilitation for spinal cord injuries

Laykin continues to work hard with her physical and occupational therapy team to gain strength and independence. Currently, in physical therapy, she is working on essential skills like transferring to and from her wheelchair and getting onto and up from the floor.

Last summer, she completed the Therastride program, a full-body-weight-supported manual treadmill that gives patients with spinal cord injuries more opportunities for movement.

"Laykin has made a lot of progress since coming to Shriners Children's Philadelphia," said Ashley, Laykin's mom. "She went from only being able to stand with her braces to now walking."

## Beyond therapy: Living life to the fullest

Laykin works hard in therapy, but her story isn't just about rehabilitation – it's about living life to the fullest. When she's not at Shriners Children's Philadelphia for appointments, she enjoys art, cheerleading, Roblox, swimming, bike riding and softball.

For every child who comes through the doors of Shriners Children's Philadelphia with a spinal cord injury, the goal is the same: to help children live happy, active and independent lives. Laykin is proof that with determination, and the right care team, she can do just that. 🧡



**DISCOVER MORE** Shriners Children's has specialized in pediatric spinal cord injury care and rehabilitation for over 40 years. Scan the QR code to get the big picture.





DEDICATED TO CARING FOR MORE KIDS IN MORE PLACES

# Expanding Access

## TO SPECIALIZED PEDIATRIC CARE

*Outreach clinics bring world-class treatment closer to families*



**I**t's simple. Help more kids. That's the driving force behind Shriners Children's unwavering commitment to transforming young lives far into the future.

So, how is the healthcare system increasing access, minimizing travel burdens and bringing care closer to where people live? >>



## Reaching more families in the Pacific Northwest

Mariah and her son Jonah, 4, have logged many miles making the three-hour drive from Missoula, Montana, to Shriners Children's Spokane, where Jonah has been a patient since birth. Born with clubfeet, he has received ongoing care at the hospital his entire life.

"In Missoula, we've lost some orthopedic providers, and we don't have any orthopedic offices that specialize in treating kids anymore," said Mariah. So, the family sought treatment with the specialists at Shriners Children's – a decision they couldn't be happier with. But the time and distance has been a challenge.

Depending on where families live, getting to appointments and staying current with their care plan can be challenging. However, accessing care is now easier than ever, thanks to five successful outreach clinics across the region. Shriners Children's Spokane now operates two clinics in central Washington – Richland and Yakima; two in western Montana – Missoula and Kalispell; and one in Fairbanks, Alaska. In 2024 alone, nearly 900 children received care at these clinics.

These clinics remove barriers for families where travel might be an obstacle. Outreach clinics offer time-saving care for hundreds of families who no longer have to drive or fly their children to Spokane to see their care team.

**"We want to better serve the needs of the families throughout our region by bringing our medical staff closer to the communities where our patients live."**

— PETER BREWER, ADMINISTRATOR, SHRINERS CHILDREN'S SPOKANE



*A young patient is intrigued by all the excitement at a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new Shriners Children's clinic opening in Missoula, Montana.*

"We want to better serve the needs of the families throughout our region by bringing our medical staff closer to the communities where they live," said Shriners Children's Spokane Hospital Administrator Peter Brewer. "It is ultimately an extension of the outpatient clinic in Spokane. Kids see the same medical staff, just in a different location."

The Spokane hospital has also expanded the program to include Pediatric Orthotic and Prosthetic Services (POPS) providers on-site. Some Shriners Children's Spokane surgeons have been credentialed at the local surgical centers to perform outpatient surgeries rather than require patients to travel to our facility.

"Having an outreach clinic right down the street is amazing," shared Mariah. "Most of these kids need ankle-foot orthoses or braces, and where we live makes getting good ones difficult. Having the orthotics team come to us to fit the kids or fine-tune their braces is such a blessing. Shriners Children's has been amazing for our family."

## Bringing care closer to families in the Midwest

Shriners Children's Twin Cities is another location making specialized pediatric care more accessible for families. Outreach clinic sites in Omaha, Nebraska, and Rapid City, South Dakota, enable medical teams to deliver high-quality care





*Staff members at the Redmond, Washington, clinic are ready to welcome patients and families from the greater Spokane area.*



*At the outreach clinic in Rapid City, South Dakota, Pamela Lang, M.D., engages mom Kacena and daughter Ruder during a follow-up visit.*

directly to the communities where patients reside, minimizing the need for families to travel long distances and ensuring they receive consistent, specialized care.

Bradie Bresina, RN, BSN, nurse care coordinator, emphasizes this model's benefits to families. "Outreach clinics allow children who live farther away to be seen more often, providing a level of convenience that significantly eases the burden on parents and caregivers," she said. Instead of traveling to the main clinic in Woodbury, Minnesota, for every appointment, families can visit outreach clinics, making healthcare more accessible and

reducing the stress and financial strain associated with long trips.

While families still need to schedule some appointments at Shriners Children's Twin Cities, where there is a full range of services, outreach initiatives ensure that every child has access to the best possible care, no matter their location.

Another significant benefit of outreach clinics is their ability to provide more frequent assessments of orthotics and prosthetics. Thanks to the outreach clinics, POPS staff can deliver and adjust orthotic and prosthetic devices directly at these locations, ensuring that children continue to receive the support they need without delay.

Beyond the medical benefits, these outreach visits also have an emotional and community-building aspect. "The kids and families are pretty excited during outreach," said Bresina. "It's like they are proud to have you come to where they live." This sentiment captures the deep impact these visits have, fostering a sense of trust and connection between families and our medical teams.

### Teamwork is key

Shriners Children's locations in Massachusetts have a long-standing collaboration that supports patients with prosthetic and orthotic needs resulting from burns and other traumatic injuries. The Shriners Children's New England POPS team works seamlessly with the Shriners Children's Boston therapeutic services department to optimize a patient's function and independence as they recover.

Brock McConkey, CPO, prosthetics and orthotics manager at Shriners Children's New England in Springfield, Massachusetts, travels to Boston once or twice a month to evaluate and fit patients for prosthetic and orthotic devices. Boston's occupational and physical therapists, led by Director of Therapeutic Services Lori Connolly, PT, DPT, work with patients as they prepare to receive and acclimate to their devices.

Telehealth visits are convenient when challenges arise between McConkey's travels to Boston. "Our patients are often not local to >>

**"Outreach clinics allow children who live farther away to be seen more often, easing the burden on caregivers."**

— BRADIE BRESINA, RN, BSN

Massachusetts, making the traditional process of custom molding and fabricating braces, orthoses and prosthetics more challenging,” said Connolly. “We often have short time frames in which to complete these devices, adding to the complexity of the situation.”

Occasionally, McConkey sees Boston patients at the Shriners Children’s New England facility if it best meets the needs of a patient and their family. “Children dealing with burn injuries are going through so many things at once,” he said. “We have to be flexible.”

Connolly’s team has a solid foundation of fabrication skills, with the ability to adjust a patient’s device so they can

continue to progress until their next POPS appointment. “I am thankful to have a department of creative and adaptive therapists,” she said. “Their experience, combined with Brock’s expertise, really optimizes the potential for our patients.”

In addition to their medical needs, an even larger team coordinates many behind-the-scenes logistics to assist Shriners Children’s Boston POPS patients. “We also communicate with our care management team, the Shriner volunteers who often provide transportation, as well as sponsors who support our families staying in the Boston area,” said Connolly. “It truly takes a village to ensure the best care for these patients.” 🐾



*Dr. Pamela Lang is part of the team providing much-needed care at the Rapid City, South Dakota, outreach clinic.*



*Outreach clinics offer time-saving care for hundreds of families, like Ryanne’s, who no longer have to drive or fly to Spokane to see their care team.*

*Ryanne gets a little love from her Labrador retriever.*




## A JOURNEY OF RESILIENCE

NAME: TAELELY

LOCATION:  
SHRINERS CHILDREN'S  
NORTHERN  
CALIFORNIA

***"Seeing Taelley  
walk again was  
a true miracle."  
— Taelley's mom***



 **DISCOVER  
MORE** Scan  
the QR code to  
learn more about  
BikeFit.



Taelley's life began with a long list of challenges. Born prematurely in 2015, Taelley faced many early health challenges, including a pulmonary hemorrhage and hydrocephalus. Doctors told Taelley's mom, Lindsey, that she would never walk, talk or have any quality of life. They were wrong.

Taelley's medical journey began outside of Shriners Children's with her first surgery to have a tiny shunt placed in her brain when she weighed just 4 pounds. Despite initial success, there were many complications. Shunts failed and became infected with staphylococcus bacteria. Taelley's resilience was tested further by a rare brain infection pushing her tiny body to the brink.

### Finding care and hope at Shriners Children's

Taelley experienced another trial at 7 years old. Intermittent shunt failure symptoms meant she had to go in for surgery, where she had a stroke on the operating room table. Despite the setback, Taelley showed remarkable courage and determination during her recovery.

Following her harrowing stroke, Taelley embarked on a transformative journey at Shriners Children's Northern California. Intense physical and occupational therapy, supported by a dedicated care team, became her path to progress. Her therapists inspired and encouraged her to walk again. Three months into therapy, she received a new leg brace and started walking with a cane.

"Any time they gave her a walker or cane, she wanted to walk on her own without assistance," Lindsey said with pride. "Seeing Taelley walk again was a true miracle. Her team at Shriners Children's is the reason she is walking today."

The BikeFit program at Shriners Children's Northern California allowed Taelley to realize her dream of riding a bike. With customized adaptive bicycles and six weeks of training, Taelley gained mobility and a newfound joy.

"The BikeFit program has been truly amazing and life-changing for Taelley and our family," said Lindsey. "Our backyard backs up to a bike trail, and now the family can ride bikes together. The smile on Taelley's face when she is riding says it all."

Now 10, Taelley has undergone 25 brain surgeries, yet she embodies resilience and determination. Walking, talking and learning to run again, she embraces life with infectious laughter and boundless spirit.



*Lura has been reunited with her beloved stuffy, Rubble, thanks to the generosity of Shriners Children's Chicago team member Aliza.*

## Small Gestures, Big Impact

*When Rubble goes missing, a staff member saves the day*

The kindness and generosity of Shriners Children's Chicago patient access team member Aliza averted heartbreak for one distraught 4-year-old.

Last December, Aliza received a message about a patient's mom who had called in distress. Her daughter, Lura, had left her favorite stuffed animal, Rubble, in the lobby the day before. Lura's mom, Crystal, said her daughter relied on the stuffed pup to comfort her during treatments. Despite a thorough search, Rubble was nowhere to be found.

A few days earlier, Aliza had won an Amazon gift card in a drawing for prizes donated for the Chicago hospital's employee holiday lunch. She used her

gift card to order a replacement Rubble, shipping it with a personal message for Lura that read, "Sent with love from the Shriners Children's Chicago Patient Access Team."

Crystal is incredibly grateful for this gesture. "Lura was so sad to lose her Rubble; I was so amazed and thankful for the patient access team and their generosity in delivering a replacement Rubble for my daughter."

The generous gesture from a Shriners Children's staff member brought a beloved comfort stuffy back to Lura and is a reminder that sometimes the little things make a big difference in a patient's life.

### LOCATIONS

