LEADERS IN *care*

STORIES OF THE MOST AMAZING CARE ANYWHERE

FALL 2026

The Courage to Win

International Patient Ambassadors
Macie and Colton Share Their Stories

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**.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Dear Readers,

One of the greatest privileges of working at Shriners Children's is witnessing what becomes possible when expertise, innovation and hope come together.

Every day across our healthcare system, we meet children who arrive facing uncertainty. A diagnosis, an injury or a complex medical condition may have changed the path they expected to follow. Yet time and again, we see those same children discover new opportunities, new confidence and new possibilities for the future.

In this issue of *Leaders in Care*, you'll meet patients whose stories illustrate that journey. You'll learn how advances in scoliosis treatment are helping young people maintain mobility and pursue the activities they love. You'll go behind the scenes with our surgical teams to see the extraordinary preparation and collaboration that support safe, exceptional care. You'll also discover how programs like music therapy help children find confidence, connection and joy during treatment. Most inspiring of all, you'll meet our new International Patient Ambassadors, whose resilience, determination and optimism represent the very best of Shriners Children's.

Their stories remind us that our work is about more than treating conditions. It is about helping children pursue dreams, reach milestones and discover what they are capable of achieving.

That mission has guided us for more than a century, and it continues to inspire us every day. Thank you for being part of our community and for helping us create brighter futures for children and families around the world.

Sincerely,

Mel Bower
Chief Marketing and Communications Officer
Shriners Children's

PATIENT PERSPECTIVES

FALL 2026

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VISIT US ONLINE to find more stories like these at **myleadersincare.com**.

ON THE COVER: Macie and Colton are the 2026–2027 International Patient Ambassadors, giving voice to the thousands of children and teens who receive life-changing care at Shriners Children's.

Shriners Children's Philadelphia Achieves Level I Specialty Status

In November, Shriners Children's Philadelphia became only the third children's hospital in the country to earn the prestigious Level I Specialty Musculoskeletal Center designation from the American College of Surgeons (ACS). This verification is the highest designation that can be awarded. Philadelphia's recognition follows Shriners Children's Northern California, awarded verification in 2022. This makes two of the three hospitals with this credential Shriners Children's facilities.

Verification relies on an extremely rigorous process. Applicant hospitals are evaluated by representative surgeons from the ACS, nursing leaders, performance improvement teams and others to show that they meet nationally recognized benchmarks.

"This prominent verification informs our patients, the community and team members that Shriners Children's is committed to delivering the safest and highest standards to ensure children receive exceptional surgical care," said Maureen Cottom, director, physician quality and outcomes.

The verification process at Shriners Children's Philadelphia took four years of work, said the hospital's director of performance improvement and risk management, Leslie Usher. "Our surgeons are world-renowned, and the outcomes of their operations are so positive and groundbreaking," she added.

We're Going Platinum!

Shriners Children's is proud to share that the Winter 2025 issue of *Leaders in Care* has received a Platinum Award in the Publications & Informational Materials/Magazine category from the 2026 Hermes Creative Awards.

The Hermes Creative Awards honor the messengers and creators driving today's information revolution, recognizing excellence across publications, websites and other communications programs. This prestigious recognition reflects the creativity, expertise and dedication of the team in delivering meaningful content for those interested in the work that Shriners Children's does.

Congratulations to everyone who contributed to this award-winning publication!

Inside the Operating Room

Hours of careful preparation help deliver the highest patient safety standards

It's 7 a.m., and Operating Room (OR) #4 at Shriners Children's Chicago is quiet. Pediatric anesthesiologist Tara Mojtahed, M.D., works alone, drawing up medication into small syringes and preparing breathing equipment before the day's first surgery.

Most families never see the operating room. But behind the OR doors, up to nine staff members will spend hours performing safety checks, preparing equipment and carefully coordinating every detail before a young patient's procedure even begins.

After a daily morning surgery safety huddle, pediatric registered nurse Ben Nguyen pushes a large cart into OR #4. It's loaded with sealed instrument trays, »

8 Keeping Kids With Scoliosis Moving

sterile equipment and supplies. "This cart includes 95% of what they'll need. The team will get other items as the case gets going," explained Mike Poelsterl, RN, a surgery coordinator.

Today's case is shoulder arthroscopy with cartilage repair for Jayden, a football player from Chicago. He began coming to Shriners Children's for pediatric orthopedic surgery several years ago after breaking his leg at travel sports camp in junior high.

Nguyen and fellow surgical nurse Kelly Le, RN, have worked together for about three years. "I handle the sterile instruments and supplies, and hand them to the surgeon," said Nruyen, who is the scrub nurse today. As the RN circulator, Le focuses on equipment, charting and patient comfort.

"We perform all safety checks to make sure each patient gets the best care possible."

— ANGELA CAREY, RN, DIRECTOR OF SURGICAL SERVICES

Nguyen puts on a mask, gown and gloves, and spreads blue covers on metal tables to create the sterile field. For 15 minutes he unloads supplies. Meanwhile, Le checks all the machines and safety monitors in the room. She powers up a microscopic camera that will be used during surgery to see inside Jayden's shoulder. Later, she'll activate a device to quickly cauterize blood vessels.

Just before 7:30 a.m., Le leaves to meet Jayden in pre-op while Nguyen carefully arranges instruments in precise order.

Nguyen meticulously counts out the number of blades and sutures. The count will be repeated before the incision is closed and again after surgery ends to ensure nothing is missing.

At 8 a.m., Jayden is wheeled into the OR. A scanner beeps as the anesthesiologist confirms his identity using his wristband. The room quiets for an anesthesia "time-out," a final verbal safety check before sedation begins.

"Right side is the correct side," Dr. Mojtahed says. Le confirms the information in the chart, and setup continues.

Pediatric orthopedic surgeon Kelsey Davidson, M.D., arrives in blue scrubs and a bright red scrub cap. At a nearby computer, she reviews Jayden's chart, X-rays and scans before joining Nguyen to review the sterile instruments placed on the tables.

"Do we have the split drapes?" she asks.

By 8:30 a.m., the surgical team makes final preparations, moving lights and monitors. The team spends nearly half an hour cleaning and preparing the patient's shoulder and arm before surgery begins. Le checks Jayden's legs to ensure his position is correct, he's comfortable and nothing is pressing into his skin.

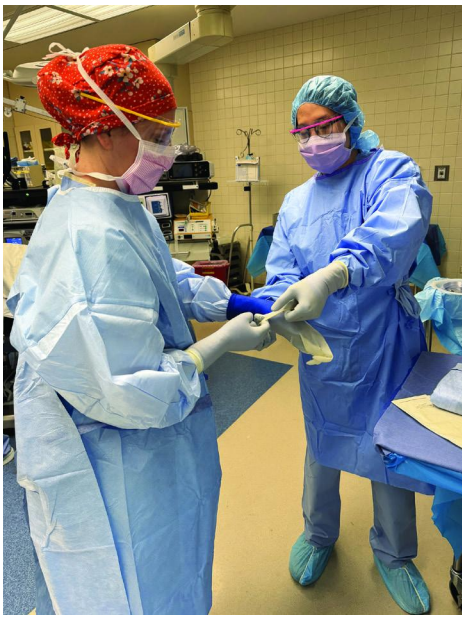
The room goes quiet for a final "time-out." Dr. Davidson has spent an hour ensuring that all tools are on hand and that Jayden is cleaned and safely positioned on the operating table.

"This extra level of attention from the surgeon is unique to Shriners Children's," says Poelsterl. Final safety checks are confirmed and Jayden's procedure begins.

Several hours later, Dr. Mojtahed says, "You're all done, Jayden," as the teen begins to wake and is taken to recovery, his shoulder in a large white bandage and black sling.

Nearly five hours after they began, Le and Nguyen are back in a quiet operating room, loading used tools and

Jayden first came to Shriners Children's for a football injury in junior high. With his second surgery, his mom, Jacky, said she was amazed to learn how much our teams do in the OR and the care provided there. "Knowing this made me feel better."



Precision and safety in the OR begin when anesthesiologists and nurses ensure all devices are sterile and in working order.

trays onto carts so they can be sent for sterilization.

"Everything went well throughout the case," Nguyen says calmly.

It's the end of a long morning of careful, coordinated work — the kind of behind-the-scenes effort patients and families rarely see but that the OR team says is essential to delivering safe, exceptional surgical care.

"It's a typical day in the OR," says Angela Carey, RN, MSN, MBA, CNOR, director of surgical services. "We perform all of these safety checks for each case to make sure every patient receives the best care possible."

What to Know About Anesthesia

For many families, the hardest moment of surgery comes when their child disappears behind the operating room doors. What many parents may not realize is that the anesthesia team has been preparing for that moment long before the procedure begins.

According to Jannet Ortiz, M.D., pediatric anesthesiologist at Shriners Children's México, care starts with a pre-anesthetic evaluation. During this visit, physicians assess the child's overall health and identify anything that could affect the procedure.

"Our goal is to understand the patient as a whole and ensure they're ready for surgery, while also answering parents' questions," she said.

On the day of surgery, patients are prepared in their rooms and accompanied by their parents to the entrance of the operating room, where they may receive medication to help them feel more relaxed.

Once inside, the anesthesiologist confirms that all equipment and medications are appropriate for the patient's age and condition. Anesthesia is then administered, most commonly through inhaled medication.

Fabiola Torres, M.D., also a pediatric anesthesiologist at Shriners Children's México, explained that during surgery, the anesthesia team continuously monitors the child's condition while the surgeon focuses on the procedure itself.

"We're there to protect the patient's life throughout the procedure," said Dr. Torres.

Did you know?

❶ **Preparation starts early.** Anesthesiologists review medical history, previous procedures, allergies, nutrition and potential risks while going over relevant factors with other specialists.

❷ **Reducing anxiety matters.** Children may receive medication to help them feel calm. Many enter the operating room relaxed or asleep.

❸ **Constant monitoring.** Throughout surgery, anesthesiologists track heart rate, breathing, blood pressure, oxygen levels and pain.

❹ **Care continues after surgery.** Recovery includes close monitoring for pain, nausea and other concerns before children reunite with their families.

Keeping Kids With Scoliosis Moving

Alternatives to spinal fusion offer new possibilities

When Shriners Children's Hawai'i patient Stayzia learned that bracing couldn't correct her scoliosis, she prepared herself for traditional spinal fusion surgery. Then 12, Stayzia understood this would mean giving up significant flexibility in her spine — a sacrifice that felt especially difficult for this competitive volleyball player. But when she met her surgeon, Kyle Mitsunaga, M.D., in 2024, he offered unexpected news: Stayzia was a candidate for a less-invasive surgical procedure called ApiFix.

The choice was clear. Rather than permanently fusing portions of her spine, Stayzia could receive an adjustable implant that would help straighten her curve while preserving the mobility she needed on the volleyball court. She chose ApiFix, joining a growing number of young patients whose scoliosis treatment looks dramatically different than what previous generations experienced.

The ApiFix fix

ApiFix is a major advancement in scoliosis care, offering a less invasive alternative to traditional spinal fusion surgery. Scott Luhmann, M.D., and Brian Kelly, M.D., at Shriners Children's St. Louis, are among approximately 70 surgeons in the United States trained to use ApiFix technology. The device is anchored onto the spine with a self-adjusting rod, and the surgeon straightens the curve as much as possible in the surgery itself. Then, the device can self-adjust and gradually correct the spine's curve over time while preserving natural movement and growth potential.

"While traditional spinal fusion surgery and vertebral body tethering (VBT) are both options that we use in some cases, I wanted to bring ApiFix to Shriners Children's St. Louis so we could provide an alternative treatment with good long-term outcomes," explained Dr. Luhmann. "The goal is to keep a greater range of back motion and function into adulthood, with fewer additional surgeries."

The difference is dramatic. The procedure typically requires a smaller incision, and recovery times are much shorter, with patients usually in the hospital only one night and able to resume regular activities within weeks and full activities in as little as three months.

The treatment works best for young teens with moderate-sized spinal curves (up to 60 degrees) who still have growth remaining and a flexible curve. Two to three years after spinal growth is complete, the ApiFix device can be removed through a simple outpatient surgery.

VBT: Trading rods for ropes

For younger patients with significant remaining growth potential, VBT is an excellent care choice that is another departure from traditional scoliosis treatment. Unlike spinal fusion surgery and ApiFix, which are performed through an incision on the back, tethering works from the front of the spine to preserve mobility.

"For the past 50 years, the standard of care for scoliosis treatment has been spinal fusion," said Amer Samdani, M.D., chief of staff at Shriners Children's Philadelphia, who has been instrumental in the development and FDA approval of VBT. "The downside is, with those rods being stiff, you're going to have some loss of mobility. With vertebral body tethering, we rely on a flexible rope — a tether, rather than a rod — that allows the spine to correct as the child grows."

"The driving force for us to develop VBT was parents of children with scoliosis," Dr. Samdani noted. "Mothers would say, 'We need an alternative. I had a spinal fusion done 20 years ago, but I want something different for my daughter.'"

Kaniyah, a 15-year-old Shriners Children's Philadelphia patient, was born missing both arms. She was diagnosed with scoliosis at age 4 and began wearing a night brace to slow the progression of her spinal curve. Encouraged by her doctor, Joshua Pahys, M.D., Kaniyah stayed committed to treatment. In 2023, as her curve unfortunately worsened, Dr. Pahys offered VBT to straighten her spine while preserving motion so she can continue to bend and use her feet like hands. Today, Kaniyah is pain-free and smiling.

Freedom to move

For young patients like Stayzia and Kaniyah, these advances mean more than improved medical outcomes — they mean freedom to move, compete and pursue what they love!

LEARN MORE

Listen to Dr. Amer Samdani discuss innovative scoliosis care on *Pediatric Frontlines*, the Shriners Children's podcast highlighting innovative clinical approaches and groundbreaking research.

Let's Make Some Noise!

An innovative music therapy program lets everyone have their moment in the spotlight

"My main goals are to normalize the hospital environment, reduce anxiety and promote creative expression and self-esteem."

— BECKY DADI, MUSIC THERAPIST, SHRINERS CHILDREN'S PHILADELPHIA

Picture this: 18-year-old Lyneth sits in the back seat of a hospital transfer car, singing "Shallow" from *A Star Is Born* while music therapist Rebecca "Becky" Dadi, MT-BC, joins in from the front seat. For a moment, it looks like two friends sharing a favorite song. But Lyneth is actually a patient preparing for spinal fusion surgery and undergoing halo traction. »

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For Lyneth, music became more than entertainment. It gave her an outlet to express herself creatively while coping with anxiety about surgery, delayed studies and being away from home. Becky also invited her to help lead sessions for other patients, giving her a sense of purpose and responsibility during an extended hospitalization.

Moments like this are at the heart of Carpool Karaoke Remixed, an innovative music therapy program at Shriners Children's Philadelphia that combines creativity, connection and clinical care. Most episodes are recorded and shared on the hospital's social channels, giving patients a chance to "guest star" in an episode.

Music therapists at Shriners Children's will tell you the impact of music is more than meaningful for their patients — it's measurable. It can ease pain, slow heart rate and reduce anxiety.

But just as important, it sparks something else: joy.

In the hands of Shriners Children's music therapists, music becomes a powerful blend of creativity, comfort and healing, turning clinical benefit into moments of real, unmistakable fun for the kids.

Viral idea, therapeutic purpose

Carpool Karaoke Remixed has become a social media phenomenon, captivating patients and staff alike. This unique, dynamic program uses music therapy to build connection, deepen understanding of medical conditions and treatments and help make the hospital environment feel more approachable.

What started a few years ago as a series to introduce hospital staff to new patients has grown into a larger project. Becky was inspired by the viral segment on James Corden's *The Late Late Show*, where he sings karaoke with celebrities in his car. She adapted the idea as an engaging outlet for patients and staff.

Not just any used car

The defining setting for Carpool Karaoke is, of course, a car. When she was first planning the series, Becky was inspired to repurpose the car in the hospital's physical therapy gym, normally used by patients in wheelchairs to practice getting in and out independently. The transfer car became an inventive new tool for music therapy.

Guest stars choose their own talents to showcase, from singing and dancing

to playing instruments and performing gymnastics. With more than 132,000 views across social media platforms, Carpool Karaoke Remixed has become extremely popular, with patients often vying for a spot on the next "episode."

Fun with a purpose

While Carpool Karaoke Remixed may seem like just a fun series, it is a valuable tool Becky uses to help patients reach their clinical and therapeutic goals.

"My main goals are to normalize the hospital environment, reduce anxiety and promote creative expression and self-esteem," Becky said. "Take halo gravity traction, which can look very scary for kids who may need to undergo that procedure. When future halo patients see other children already in halos on Carpool Karaoke having a great time, it alleviates stress and helps them feel better."

Eighteen-year-old Gerald experienced that firsthand. While preparing for scoliosis surgery, he worked with Becky to write an original song and perform it on Carpool Karaoke Remixed. Through songwriting, he built self-confidence and processed the emotions surrounding his treatment. In his song, he shared that his differences are what make him special and strong.

Another patient, Sarah, used the platform to speak about adapting to a right leg and foot amputation. She came on Carpool Karaoke Remixed and shared how she is learning to drive with her left foot. "I hope her story will inspire all our patients to follow their dreams and achieve their goals no matter what," Becky said. »

Music therapist Becky Dadi, MT-BC, enjoys a musical "ride" with Elisabet, 13, a patient with osteogenesis imperfecta who took her very first steps at Shriners Children's Philadelphia.

Singing, dancing or performing cartwheels are all welcome talents for Carpool Karaoke Remixed.

The Power of Song

After 15-year-old Vanessa sustained a traumatic brain injury that left her paralyzed and unable to speak, the clinicians who first treated her saw little hope for improvement. But everything changed when Vanessa became a patient of the inpatient rehabilitation program at Shriners Children's Northern California, where music opened a door into her world. One day, Ronni Paine, MT-BC, NMT, neurologic music therapist, noticed Vanessa responded to songs. Starting with singing a single word, Vanessa progressed to singing entire choruses. From that point on, music was part of her therapy routine. After six months of hard work and dedication, Vanessa walked out of the hospital unaided. She continues to sing and dance, a testament to the power of music therapy.

From Therapy to Daily Practice

The first time Thomas heard a guitar and a piano being played live was when music therapists visited his room at Shriners Children's Boston. Thomas, then 9, was being treated for an esophageal burn. "During hospital stays, many people, including myself, need a distraction. Music therapy helped a lot," Thomas recalled. Nearly 10 years later, Thomas still finds joy in the same passion that was a bright spot during recovery. "Music therapy is one of the reasons I became a pianist — to help others through music." Thomas is self-taught and enjoys starting his days by playing the piano.

Another episode featured inpatient Ryan as the guest star, with cameos from fellow patients cheering him on and offering high-fives after his performance. The episode captured something that cannot be measured in views alone: the sense of community built within the hospital.

Carpool Karaoke Remixed is more than a social media sensation. It is a creative extension of music therapy that helps reduce anxiety, build confidence and showcase resilience — all while giving patients and staff their moment in the spotlight.

Composition and Connection

Music therapist Michelle Russell, MT-BC, LPMT, NMT, from Shriners Children's Chicago, brings her guitar to Marian in the patient activity mall as the two collaborate on a song. Marian, 18, is in the hospital recovering from spine surgery and first connected with music therapy while in halo gravity traction for scoliosis. The therapy helped shift her perspective about feeling like she had limited movement to regaining a sense of control and social connection. Now, during recovery, Marian continues to play the guitar in her hospital room, practicing independently and extending therapy benefits beyond her sessions with Michelle.

Beyond the Initial Burn Injury

Innovative technologies lead to better healing

When a child suffers a serious burn injury, the impact extends far beyond the initial trauma. Shriners Children's burn specialists use advanced technologies and innovative treatments to improve healing, minimize scarring, restore function and help children achieve better long-term outcomes in both appearance and quality of life.

At Shriners Children's Texas, a newly updated in-house 3D printer is playing a critical role in minimizing scarring for children recovering from facial burns. Access to this technology allows the burn rehabilitation team to deliver treatment more quickly and improve outcomes.

One of the most important tools in facial burn recovery is the transparent facial orthosis (TFO), a clear, custom-fitted mask that applies gentle, consistent pressure to healing skin, helping scars flatten and mature properly.

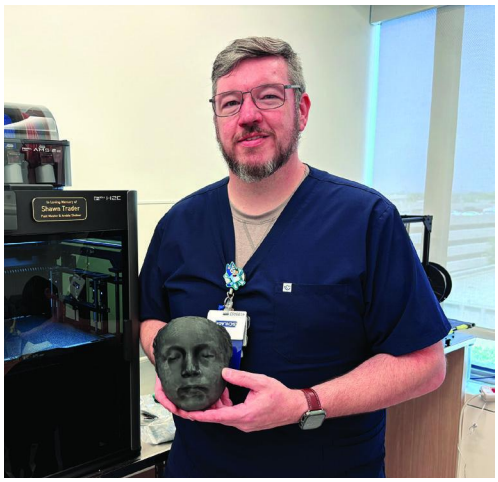
In the early stages of healing, scars can quickly become tight and raised. In the past, facial molds were outsourced, which often took weeks. Now, the 3D printer enables clinicians to begin treatment much sooner.

"If scars tighten too much, they can interfere with how the face moves and works. Applying proper pressure early is incredibly important," said physical therapist Chris Whitehead, PT, at Shriners Children's Texas.

A quick, noninvasive 3D scan of the child's face is fine-tuned on a computer, then sent to the 3D printer to produce a physical mold. The mold is then used to shape a clear thermoplastic mask.

Because the masks are transparent, therapists can clearly see the scarring underneath and assess how well pressure is being applied. Scar rating scales help track progress over time, allowing care plans to be adjusted as healing progresses.

At right, physical therapist Chris Whitehead holds the 3D-printed mold used to create a custom-fitted facial mask for Tikva, 9, an important tool in burn recovery.



ients typically wear their TFOs throughout scar matu- which may last one to two years. As swelling decreases, often or children grow, masks often require modification acement. Producing TFOs in-house allows our team to ond more quickly and collaborate closely, reflecting our mmitment to patient-centered care and innovation.

Scar management techniques restore mobility and build confidence

Kim was at a lake near her home in Vermont when she eceived the kind of call every parent fears: Her two-year- laughter Harper had been taken to a local hospital after into a fire pit. When Kim arrived at the hospital, she was arper's injuries were severe and she would need to be air- o Shriners Children's Boston for specialized burn care. Harper has grown, her care has transitioned to the anagement phase, under the care of plastic surgeon l Driscoll, M.D., who performed a z-plasty procedure on »

her thumb. This is a technique used to soften the appearance of a scar and improve the function of that part of the body by cutting into the scar with an incision that looks like the letter Z.

"A z-plasty is a way to treat a burn scar that has contracted and inhibits function. It borrows tissue from one direction to lengthen in another direction," said Dr. Driscoll.

He also employs ultra pulse laser therapy on Harper's scars about twice a year. Laser therapy is a less invasive approach to scar management compared to a traditional surgical procedure.

"Scars tend to get tighter as a child grows, so there is a need for long-term yearly follow-up. As Harper grows, we will see if she needs interventions such as lasers to soften the scars, z-plasty or grafts to treat functional contractures. It is a process that levels out after growth phases slow down," Dr. Driscoll said.

Now, almost seven years after her burn injury, Harper is an active 9-year-old who loves sports. "She plays basketball, softball, soccer and she wrestles. I call her my 'honey badger,'" Kim said. When she's not playing sports, Harper loves to swim and play outside, ride bikes and fish.

Through compassion and leading-edge technology, Shriners Children's helps young patients heal more fully and move forward with confidence.

Severely burned in a fire pit accident at age 2, Harper is now an active 9-year-old who plays basketball, soccer and softball after treatment from the burn specialists at Shriners Children's Boston.

'An Honor to Give Back'

Earlier this year, the Spokane Arena in Washington buzzed with excitement as fans gathered for the third annual Drop the Mitts for Shriners Children's hockey game. What began as a dream for Ben — a Shriners Children's Spokane patient alumnus and lifelong hockey player — has grown into a successful fundraiser hockey game that precedes a Spokane Chiefs game, giving supporters two thrilling matchups and one incredible cause to rally behind.

At 16, Ben underwent a complex spinal fusion at Shriners Children's Spokane. The top-level care he received not only stabilized his spine — it gave him his future back. Today, he's thriving, active and determined to pay that gift forward.

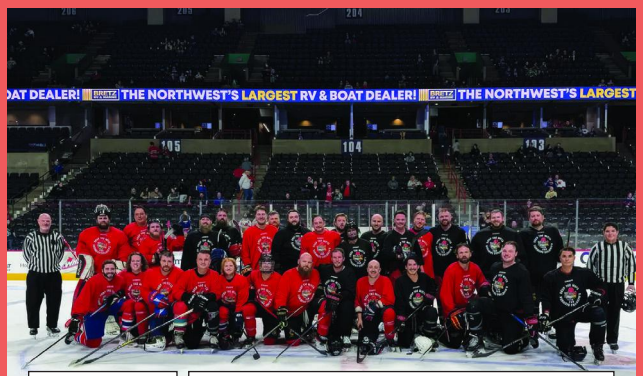
"I knew I wanted to do something to give back and finally got the opportunity to make that happen," said Ben. "One donation here and there just didn't feel like enough for what Shriners Children's did for me."

Drop the Mitts is Ben's way of honoring that care — and inviting the community to join him. He selects players with personal ties to Shriners Children's, creating a team united by gratitude and purpose. Together, they skate to ensure more kids can receive the same high-quality orthopedic care he did.

The event is aligned with Shriners Children's *Raise Funds. Change Lives.* program, demonstrating how do-it-yourself fundraising empowers supporters to transform personal passions, whether athletic or creative, into life-changing care for children.

Thanks to the generosity of the community, Drop the Mitts has raised more than $40,000 in just three years — funds that directly support innovative care for kids across the Pacific Northwest.

"It's such an honor to give back," Ben said about his participation. "I'm so thankful for the Spokane community for coming together to help children."



LEARN MORE

Visit **fundraise.shrinerschildrens.org** to learn how raising funds through the activities you love can help change children's lives.

Strong Hearts and Big Dreams

Introducing our 2026–2027 International Patient Ambassadors

Every year, two patients are chosen to represent Shriners Children's as our International Patient Ambassadors, giving voice to the thousands of children and teens who receive life-changing care at Shriners Children's. They speak from experience, and their stories are a powerful way to share the impact of our healthcare system. ››

18 When Viral Trends Turn Dangerous

These young role models demonstrate how Shriners Children's patients are able to overcome challenges and pursue their dreams — while reflecting Shriners Children's unique spirit, nurturing atmosphere and clinical excellence.

Meet Macie

The first pitch came with a mix of nerves and certainty. Standing on the mound again after surgery, Macie remembers thinking she was either ready, or she wasn't.

"My coach started me in our first tournament of the season," she said. "I threw that first pitch, and I knew the procedure had worked. I think I struck out the first batter."

For Macie, a 15-year-old pitcher from Tampa, Florida, moments like that carry extra weight. Softball has been part of her life since she was 7, and she's long hoped to play at the college level. So, when she was diagnosed at age 10 with idiopathic scoliosis, a curvature of the spine, the fear wasn't just about treatment — it was about losing the game she loved.

"I was scared I wouldn't be able to play softball, or any sport, anymore," she said.

Macie began wearing a nighttime brace and followed her treatment plan carefully, hoping to avoid progression. But despite her efforts, the curve worsened. Surgery was eventually recommended — an option that could have limited her spinal mobility and affected her ability to pitch.

Macie's mother, Michelle, a pediatric nurse, began searching for alternatives. That led her to Shriners Children's Philadelphia and spine surgeon Amer Samdani, M.D., who is a pioneer of vertebral body tethering (VBT). VBT uses a flexible, belt-like tether attached to individual vertebrae. As the child grows, the tether guides the spine into a straighter position — without sacrificing flexibility. The procedure is only possible for children who are still growing, and Macie was an ideal candidate.

In October 2023, she and her mother drove 17 hours from Tampa to Philadelphia for surgery.

Macie's recovery moved quickly. Within two months, she was back on the mound.

A year later, follow-up imaging told the rest of the story.

"It was a completely different picture," said Macie. "It showed me my spine had changed and that I didn't have to worry about it anymore."

In 2025, Macie was invited to the Shriners Children's Clearwater Invitational to throw out the ceremonial first pitch and meet players on the University of Alabama softball team — an experience she still calls unforgettable.

Now a Shriners Children's International Patient Ambassador, she said her motivation is simple.

"I want to give back because I don't think anything could ever repay

"I'm proud to share how special Shriners Children's is."

— COLTON

Shriners Children's for what they did for me," she said. "The Shriners are the best example of the most caring, giving people. It's amazing to see that kind of passion and dedication to kids."

Meet Colton

The decision came early in life, long before Colton could remember it. When he was born, his family was told he had fibular hemimelia — the absence of the smaller of the two bones in the lower leg — along with a shorter leg, bowed tibia, malformed ankle and missing toe.

His mother, Becky, still remembers the uncertainty of his conditionin those early days and the moment they first walked into Shriners Children's St. Louis. "You could literally feel the warmth, the love and the caring before we even talked to anybody," she recalled.

At Shriners Children's St. Louis, orthopedic surgeon Perry Schoenecker, M.D., outlined two possible treatment paths. One involved a series of limb-lengthening surgeries beginning around age 8 or 9, together with ankle reconstruction — a long process that can take five to 10 years. The other was amputation at the ankle and then fitting the baby for a prothesis.

The family chose amputation and has never regretted that decision. Colton had his first surgery when he was 1 and received his first prosthesis shortly after that. He is currently on his tenth prosthetic device.

While his prosthesis makes him different from friends and classmates, Colton knows it also provides him opportunities. He is able to show that with diligence and a dream, anything is possible, no matter the hurdles. "I'm sticking out for a reason," he said.

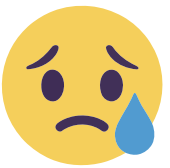
An accomplished student-athlete, Colton has competed in wrestling, baseball, basketball and track, and currently participates in football and golf for his high school. He plays both offensive and defensive line for his high school football team and played in two high school golf tournaments. Colton has been a patient ambassador at the Kansas Shrine Bowl many times, even serving as a manager for the West team since 2024. His goal is to return to the field — this time as a player in 2027.

Colton lives in a small Kansas town surrounded by miles of wide open wheat fields. He loves the freedom of rural life, where everything he needs — school, the coffee shop, the golf course, the football field — is close and familiar. Whether raising and showing pigs as part of his youth agricultural project or tackling daily farm work alongside his grandpa, uncle and cousin, Colton is always up for the task.

Colton speaks about Shriners Children's with deep affection and loyalty and is grateful for the opportunity to help others as he was helped.

"My favorite part of being an International Patient Ambassador is being able to share how special Shriners Children's is," he said. "They're not just doctors and nurses — they're part of your family."

When Viral Trends Turn Dangerous



Social media challenges spark serious burn injuries

From fire challenges and boiling water dares to exploding phone trends, social media fads are leaving more kids with real-world scars. What starts as a viral video can become a trip to the emergency room — with serious burn injuries that can last a lifetime.

What burn doctors are seeing

At Shriners Children's locations in Ohio, Texas, Northern California and Boston, clinicians see the same scenario: A child saw the latest viral challenge and tried to recreate it.

Social media can push a dangerous trend to millions of young users overnight. Lyndsay Mata, NP, at Shriners Children's Texas, says that unlike seasonal hazards, social media risks have no slow period.

At Shriners Children's Northern California, Tina Palmieri, M.D., and Liz Thorpe, RN, have watched the pattern emerge: A trend surfaces, and quickly, multiple children arrive with similar injuries.

A parent's story

Kristy's teenage daughter suffered second-degree facial burns after attempting a viral challenge — microwaving gel stress balls, which can heat to more than 200°F in seconds and explode.

"Seeing my daughter badly burned after doing a TikTok trend broke my heart," said Kristy. "Please talk to your kids about not copying things they see online. We're grateful for the quick care she received at Shriners Children's Ohio."

The pressure is 24/7

"Today's teens aren't just dealing with peer pressure at school — it follows them home," said Jillian Pasciucco, NP, at Shriners Children's Boston. Social feeds never stop showing what other kids are doing or what's getting views, and they want to fit in.

Alice Fagin, M.D., at Shriners Children's Ohio, points to a reality that people rarely consider: "What we don't see is how many takes this TikTok person did, or how many little injuries they might have," she said.

It's a point Dr. Palmieri frames in a broader cultural context. Decades before social media, Saturday morning cartoons exposed children to depictions of fire and dangerous stunts. "Every three minutes a kid was exposed to someone getting burned and there was almost never a consequence," she said.

Social media has accelerated that dynamic in new ways, but the underlying pattern is the same: consequence-free media shaping behavior.

What parents can do

When faced with these risks, the instinct is to remove the phone or add controls. Those tools matter, but specialists emphasize conversation. "Stay curious and engaged," said Jillian. "Ask what your child is seeing and what pressures they feel." Liz added that parents and teens often inhabit entirely different online worlds, making it essential to learn the landscape, ask questions and watch together. Helping kids understand the real consequences is the best way to keep them safe.

Burns and other injuries can result when kids and teens try to emulate dangerous stunts trending on social media. Remind the kids in your life that not everything they see online is as safe as it appears.

BELIEVING IN HIS JOURNEY

Jordan doesn't believe in limits, and his life is proof of that belief. Born with amniotic band syndrome and missing part of his left arm, the 17-year-old has grown into a confident student, athlete and mentor who embraces every opportunity.

From the very beginning, Jordan approached life with determination. He explored sports early, trying nearly everything his peers did, and quickly discovered a love for basketball. Today, Jordan competes as a high school-level basketball player, runs on the varsity track team and spends his free time lifting weights and staying active. His dedication, discipline and team-first attitude have earned respect from coaches and teammates alike, not because of his limb difference, but because of his work ethic.

Jordan's journey has been deeply supported by the care he receives at Shriners Children's Twin Cities, where he was fitted with prosthetic devices that didn't just support movement but also helped build his confidence and independence.

"Without Shriners Children's Twin Cities' help, Jordan wouldn't be able to play basketball," said his mother, Dinah. "From the bottom of my heart, thank you for all you do."

Beyond the court, Jordan has found purpose in community. Having attended multiple Shriners Children's camps when he was younger, he has now stepped into a camp mentorship role through the Never Say Never Foundation. There, he encourages younger kids with limb differences to try sports, take chances and believe in themselves.

Jordan hopes to attend college one day, explore a career in business or environmental work and continue to inspire others along the way. Most of all, he wants people to understand that a limb difference should never mean exclusion.

Jordan shines not because of what he has overcome, but because of how fully he lives, leads and lifts others with him.

Dedication and perseverance keep Jordan active on the court and in his community.

LEADERS IN care

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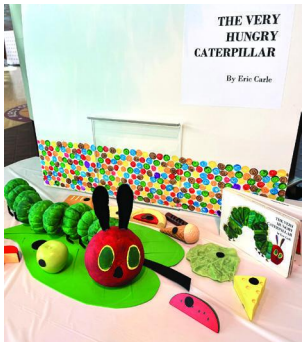
Pumpkin-Palooza!

Gourd-geous designs delight patients and families

Each fall, the staff at Shriners Children's Chicago pulls out all the stops to make Halloween a fun and colorful time for patients and their families. Just before Halloween, departments find time for a friendly but intense competition. The annual pumpkin decorating contest brings in more than 20 creative entries each year, many featuring popular children's characters and movies. All are kid-friendly and full of imagination, perfect for a pediatric audience. With just two rules — no carving and no plug-in accessories — the staff transforms simple pumpkins into amazing temporary works of art enhanced with backdrops, props, sound effects and music.

Once completed, all the decorated pumpkins are unveiled in the Patient Activity Mall where patients, families and staff cast their votes for their favorites. In 2025, the rehabilitation department won first place with their "Lilo & Stitch" inspired pumpkins.

Halloween celebrations at Shriners Children's Chicago also include a staff costume contest. The annual Halloween party for patients and families organized by our recreational therapy and child life department brings together accessible, indoor trick-or-treating, music, crafts and special guests, making for a fun, inclusive experience for all.



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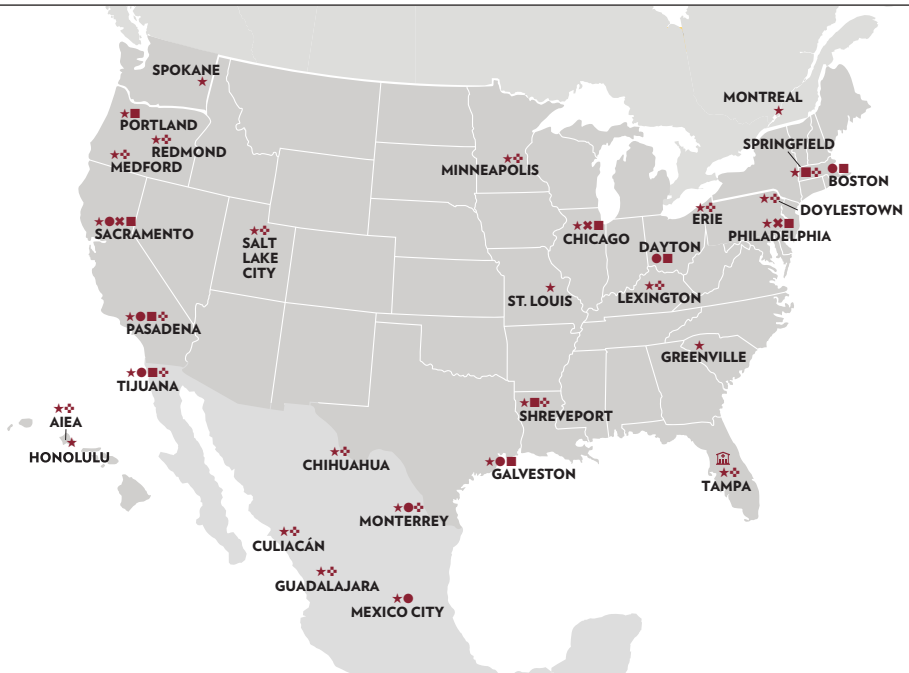

- ★ Orthopedics
- ● Burn care
- ✖ Spinal cord injury
- ■ Cleft lip and palate
- ✤ Outpatient care only; necessary inpatient care provided at an affiliated facility
- Shriners Children's and Shriners International Headquarters