Many Silver Linings Found at Children’s Nursing Home, Where the Sun Keeps Shining Amid the Pandemic

“It’s not always easy, but we are certainly making our own fun,” says Kym August, the Therapeutics Activities Supervisor at the Sunshine Children’s Home, a residential care facility for medically complex children in Ossining, NY. “There are always silver linings, no matter what the situation. These children, despite their challenges and disabilities, just love to have fun.”

“Sunshine has certainly changed over the past few weeks - but we are good, healthy and happy,” she added.

Sunshine Children’s Home and Rehab Center is a 54-bed licensed skilled nursing facility specializing in the care and treatment of critically ill children. Sunshine works as part of a continuum with the large pediatric hospital centers for children who have survived catastrophic accidents, injuries, and illnesses, and who continue to require a high level of specialized care and support. The children’s conditions are too complex and fragile to be cared for in the home.

On March 9, Sunshine closed its doors to all visitors, families included, as recommended by the CDC and the Department of Health. The Sunshine Team, led by Dr. Natalie Neu, Pediatric -more-
Infectious Disease Specialist from Columbia Presbyterian Hospital, quickly kicked into gear an emergency COVID plan that “focuses on health and safety first, and yet provides the children with consistency in their routines, safety, love and warmth. The children should not be feeling the fear associated with this pandemic,” says August.

She added, “Our focus continues to be on the quality of life for all the children in our care. Each day at Sunshine welcomes a new celebration, special event or fun activity. Our commitment is to keep life at Sunshine as unchanged as possible. We have virtual school each day through our partnership with Putnam Northern Westchester BOCES, as well as our own on-site preschool program. Our team has also been working closely with all the teachers and we stay connected using creative web-based platforms, such as Schoology, Google classrooms and Zoom. The children really respond to seeing their teachers, hearing familiar voices and singing songs.”

“We are always engaging in creative play, like learning new dances and the interactions with staff really amuse the children,’ continues August. “The TA (Therapeutics Activities) staff, along with other essential staff, made a TikTok video that the children really enjoyed. There are also continuous creative games, like “Hide & Seek” from staff, rock bands and lots of coloring and painting.”

According to August, the kids like to make the staff smile. “Our medical team, our nursing team, our respiratory therapists, housekeepers, food staff are all a part of a community working hard to keep these children safe and COVID-free.”

“We have orchestrated a series of fun and silly projects designed to make our front-line workers smile and let them know how appreciated they are. Under the guidance of Sunshine’s Social Work team, I help run Sunshine’s staff “Daily Booster” program that’s designed to support staff through our adopted mantra “hear me, protect me, prepare me, support me and care for me.”

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Amid Pandemic, Sun Keeps Shining at Sunshine Children’s Home… pg. 3

This Booster Program is specifically designed for the physical and emotional well-being of all of our front-line workers. The program highlights have included Mindful Minutes, Wall of Gratitude, Color Me Calm, Coffee and Chocolates, and Haagen-Dazs Day. Other morale boosters include movement and socialization activities, such as chair yoga, dance line, scavenger hunts, and the ever popular Getting to Know You Bingo, as well as weekly raffles and specialty meals.

As the weather continues to improve, Sunshine’s 33-acres has become an outdoor wonderland with all the nature to explore. “Walking outside in the fresh air has been so wonderful for the staff and the children. Listening to the birds sing, watching the fish in the pond and feeling the wind blow has been great,” says August.

Linda Mosiello, administrator at the Sunshine Children’s Home, says her team is in constant communication with families sharing photos, videos, and FaceTime updates, as well as reassuring these worried families that their children are healthy and safe.

Says Lady Stephens, whose eight-year old grandson is a resident at Sunshine, “This crisis makes me ever so mindful of how exceptional you all are and how vital each of you are for the well-being of my grandson. I am able to have peace of mind knowing that you are making a human barrier of protection for all the children, which is not without risk to your own lives each day.”

Mosiello reports that the outpouring of appreciation and generosity from Sunshine’s neighbors, as well as the surrounding community “really sustains our team. We have received beautiful hand-crafted masks, personalized cards, and children’s inspiring artwork. There’s been an amazing outpouring of love and generosity from the community during this time. It means so much to us.”

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“We are all – children and staff alike -- part of one cohesive Sunshine family. Having each other’s backs and recognizing each individual is the culture here,” says Mosiello. “We love these children and have always cared for them as our own and that is the case now more than ever.”

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