



Expanding  
Horizons in  
the  
Lion's Den

A  
Stewardship  
Report

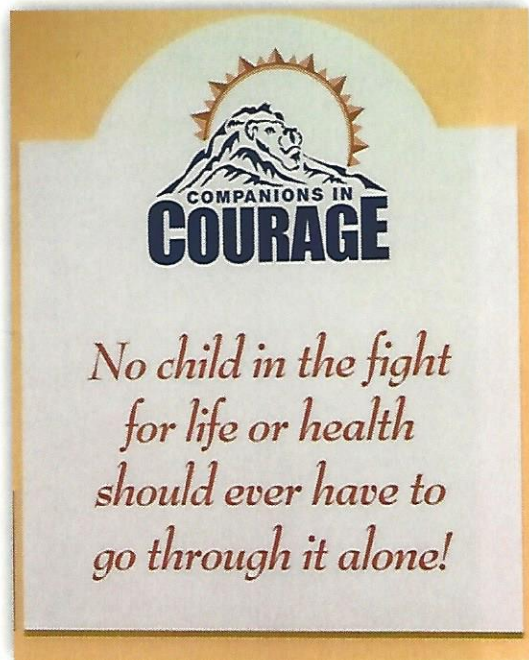
*Prepared  
Especially  
for:*

Mr. Jim  
Johnson

Companions  
in Courage







Dear Jim:

At Connecticut Children's Medical Center, our patients can find a fun or leisurely activity in the Lion's Den to spark their interest nearly every day of the week. From themed-art activities to Bingo and game nights with college students, there are many opportunities that appeal to our pediatric population. Thanks to the Companions in Courage Foundation, kids of all ages have the opportunity to spend time outside of their rooms in the brightly colored space uninterrupted by doctors that is outfitted with new technology and engaging games. The Lion's Den motivates our patients to move even when they're not feeling their best, and it fosters the growth of friendships and connections with others.

I am pleased to provide you with an update on how we have used the Lion's Den as an important resource for patients and their families since its dedication on May 23, 2017. The space was clearly designed with the needs of our patients in mind, and for that we are grateful. I hope you enjoy reading about the impact Companions in Courage has had on our children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Katie Robbins'.

Katie Robbins  
Child Life Specialist

## The Difference You Make

The date is February 4, 2018. In Hartford, Connecticut, there's a Super Bowl party underway, and it's clear that there's a divide between Eagles fans and Patriots fan in this northeastern city. There are teenagers wearing their favorite jerseys, expressing joy or angst with every call made on the flat-screen TV. Parents sit at one end of the table, chatting and showing each other recent photos on their phones. Two toddlers play across the room, one crafting a Lego masterpiece while the other races matchbox cars around a nonexistent track.

This may seem like a normal Super Bowl celebration. But what's different about this party is that the festivities are taking place at Connecticut Children's Medical Center, where one of the teenagers is receiving intravenous chemotherapy while cheering on his favorite team, and the other is watching the game from his wheelchair as he recovers from surgery. The parents have bonded over their children's diagnoses, and they have found comfort in finding someone else who understands what they're going through. One of the toddlers is a recent cardiology patient, and the other is a gastroenterology patient, who is currently on a liquid diet to increase nutrition.

Thanks to the Companions in Courage Foundation, these patients and their families had the opportunity to attend a Super Bowl party hosted just for them at the Lion's Den. The open layout of the room was designed to accommodate children in wheelchairs, and appropriate seating is available for patients and families of all sizes. For a few hours that day, these patients were able to engage in this annual activity, just like their peers, and take a needed break from their diagnoses.

## Outside Connections

The Child life team at Connecticut Children's has reported that the older patients are especially fond of the X-Boxs in the Lion's Den, which were made possible by your foundation's support. Even though they may come from different backgrounds and have different diagnoses, teenagers can bond over their shared interest in video games. Members of the child life team are available to switch the game when desired. In an atmosphere where our young patients have lost control in the hospital environment due to procedures, tests and exams, patients have the opportunity to regain some control by coming to this environment and picking a game to play that is perfect for them. Some of these games have the option to be played in a multi-player function, which encourages friendships among patients. For a child who may have spent time outside of a mainstream school, these connections are critical.

Outside of video games, patients can stay connected through the new computers that are available for use. Patients can remain connected with their school and keep up with assignments. They can also use social media to connect with their friends and family and browse the internet for fun.

Furthermore, in the coming year the Child Life team will begin to use the special feature to connect the Lion's Den at Connecticut Children's to other Lion's Dens. This will be an excellent opportunity to reduce feelings of isolation among patients and families and create connections outside the Medical Center.

## A Procedure-Free Space for Our Patients

Marked by its bright colors and cheerful music, the Lion's Den is one of the few non-medical spaces on the eighth floor of the hospital. The Medical Center has instituted a rule that no medical procedures will take place while patients are in the Lion's Den. Patients will not receive a visit from a doctor or nurse to have their blood drawn, nor will they receive an exam of any kind. The only doctor visit they will receive will be from a physician who is willing to play and make a deeper personal connection.

Patients in the Lion's Den will from time to time receive special visits from Medical Center volunteers. These volunteers have committed to spend time in the Lion's Den to play games with the younger patients and foster relationships with the older patients. This dedicated space allows these relationships to grow naturally.



Patients may also receive a visit from our long-time resident clown, Valentine. These types of fun visits are encouraged at the Lion's Den to give our patients a break from their daily routine that is otherwise ruled by their diagnoses. The Companions in Courage Foundation has given our patients a place to express themselves as well as a safe space to relax and unwind.

Last year, patients in the Lion's Den received a special type of visit. 2015 American Idol champion Nick Fradiani, who is a Guilford, CT native, came to Connecticut Children's Medical Center and specifically to the Lion's Den to put on an intimate performance for families. It was a special moment for our patients who may have been too sick to attend a concert in a regular venue.





## The Patient Experience

The Lion's Den makes a world of difference for 20-year-old Casey. Casey has sickle cell disease, and finds herself routinely admitted to Connecticut Children's throughout the year for treatment. Casey is constantly in some level of pain due to her disease, and she will eventually need a double-hip replacement. The disease has deteriorated her hip bones, and she hopes that the surgery will help her increase her mobility and that she will eventually have the strength to drive. Casey is one of five siblings and, despite her constant pain, helps her mom around the house whenever she can.

Casey is brave, and every day must navigate the reality of her diagnosis. While at the Medical Center, this may mean more tests, more treatments and news from her providers that may be difficult to hear. But when she's



admitted, Casey comes to the Lion's Den every day for a visit, as long as she's able. What awaits her within those brightly colored walls is a few moments of escape. Here, she can be creative. She'll engage in the pre-scheduled art project during the afternoons throughout the week. Or she will stop by to play a game or use the computers.

The strength that Casey gains from the Lion's Den helps her get through the day. She'll tell you that she loves using this space to meet other patients and their parents and bond over their experiences. She's made many great connections in the Lion's Den with other patients, and that helps.

"Everyone is so polite. It's like one big family," she said.

Thank you, Companions in Courage Foundation, for your generous support to create an interactive Lion's Den facility on our eighth floor inpatient unit. You have made a big difference in the lives of our patients – patients like Casey – at Connecticut Children's Medical Center.





*"Sunny Days" by Jessica, Age 5*

