



Mt. Washington
Pediatric Hospital

Handprints

SUMMER 2025

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Our Work Makes a Difference

The story of a young burn victim's healing, inside and out,
reminds us of the impact MWPH makes



At the heart of the work we do here at Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital (MWPH) is the impact we have on children's lives. Here is one inspiring patient story, shared by LaTonia May-Brown, RRT, director of respiratory care and lab services at MWPH.

In September 2024, 10-year-old Blake came to MWPH after going through a horrific tragedy. He is the survivor of a serious house fire, which took place in July of that year. The fire claimed the lives of Blake's mother and her boyfriend, and Blake suffered burns over 60 percent of his body, including his neck, chest, back, arms, legs, feet, hands, and face. Blake is an only child and his father was in the military, stationed overseas.

In acute care, Blake underwent multiple surgeries and skin grafts. He then came to MWPH to continue his recovery. The first time May-Brown met Blake, she was consulting with a respiratory therapist about his care. He had a trach and was on a ventilator at night. "I'll always remember that first meeting and how he looked — not just the burns, but how withdrawn and hopeless he seemed to feel in that dark room," May-Brown said.

The team's goal was to help prepare Blake for discharge and returning home. Respiratory therapy was a big part of that work, as Blake's lungs had been damaged by the smoke, so May-Brown continued to see him regularly. At first, she recalled,

continued on next page >>

Our Work Makes a Difference *continued*

“Watching his growth as he accepted what was thrown at him and didn’t give up is truly inspiring.”

— LaTonia May-Brown, RRT

“Anytime he was out of his room, he would be in his wheelchair and covered with a sheet, like a ghost.” He didn’t want anyone to see him.

But as time went on at MWPH, things began to change. Two months later, Blake had swapped the sheet for a large stuffed animal that covered his body. A few weeks after that, he got up the courage to walk the halls without anything hiding his appearance.

The respiratory therapy team was also working to get Blake off ventilator support. They first transferred to oxygen at night, and then they pushed to cap the trach, which would force him to breathe through

his nose and mouth once again. The team celebrated when the trach finally came out.

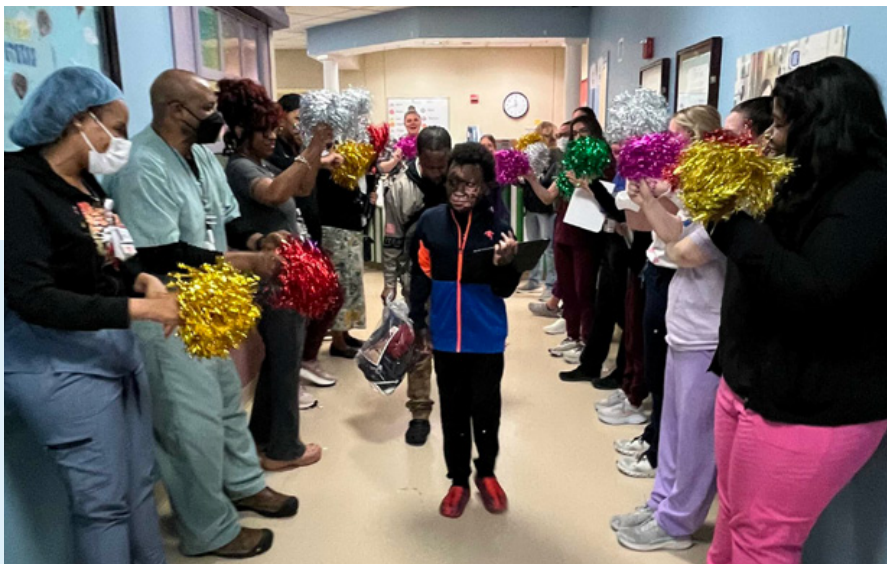
May-Brown remembers the day she was reviewing patient charts and noticed on the patient status board that Blake had a picture. Blake had agreed to let a photo of himself be taken and displayed there, along with all the others.

“Looking back at the steps that he made, it shows the resilience of this child, who was faced with some hard life experiences at a young age, not just his burns, but also losing his mother,” May-Brown said. “Watching his growth as he accepted what was thrown at him and didn’t give up is truly inspiring.”

While Blake came into MWPH in a wheelchair, on a ventilator, and with a trach, in March 2025 he walked out the front door without any of them.

Before he left, he asked to see a ventilator again, since he had used one when he arrived. He said, “I forgot how it looked. It’s an old friend now — I don’t need it anymore.”

Today, Blake is almost 12 and lives with his father out of state. Every person who works at MWPH can take pride in knowing that their efforts helped Blake — and help hundreds more patients like him every year.



Blake walks out of MWPH with his father on discharge day with MWPH nurses and staff cheering him on.

UPCOMING EVENTS

JUN
19

JULY
17

AUG
21

GETTING HOME TOGETHER

4–6 p.m.

Heal and Grow Dining Room

Patient families, please join us for dinner and transition-to-home support.

ALL
July

CHRISTMAS IN JULY AT MWPH

Throughout the month of July, we’re collecting new toys from our wish list in preparation for the holiday season and to use year-round, too! Please drop your toys in the bin in the main lobby.

JULY
23

CHRISTMAS IN JULY HAPPY HOUR AND TOY DRIVE

5–7 p.m.

Mt. Washington Tavern

Please bring a new, unwrapped toy and join us for Baltimore’s best happy hour.

JULY
24

CHRISTMAS IN JULY DAY

10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

MWPH main campus

Come to MWPH to deliver toys and meet special guests.

SEPT
15

MWPH 25TH ANNUAL GOLF TOURNAMENT

Shotgun start 11 a.m.

Woodholme Country Club

For more info, visit: mwph.org/golf

OCT
4

SAVE THE DATE WALKING WITH GRACE

McDonogh School



Message from the President

Dear Friends,

At a fundamental level, our hospital is about people. Our expertise, our technology, our equipment, our buildings, our processes, and all the other aspects that make up our organization rely on our people to bring MWPH to life. Day after day, I read testimonials from patient families, and the most impactful part of the care their child received – what means the most to them – is always the people who cared for their child, helped them through difficult days, greeted their family with a warm smile, listened to challenges and brainstormed solutions, and so many other moments.

Our staff members make it possible for us to meet our patients' needs and exceed their families' expectations. Thank you to the many staff members who recently completed the SCORE survey, an employee engagement survey we participated in as part of the University of Maryland Medical System. Now, we are reviewing the results and meeting with staff to share those results and address opportunities, and we expect this work to continue through the year.

The SCORE survey looks at our safety culture, our teamwork, and includes a burnout thermometer. Healthcare has gotten harder,

and it's important for us to support our staff in the work they do to ensure we have high quality and safe care, as well as that special loving and caring working environment that MWPH has always been known for.



Sincerely,

Scott Klein, MD, MHSA
President and CEO

Where Are They Now?—Emma Guzman

In December 2019, 6-year-old Emma Guzman had a seizure for the first time. She was hospitalized for several months at the University of Maryland Medical System, and then at Johns Hopkins. Emma was diagnosed with anti-NMDAR encephalitis. Her family was told she might not walk again, might need a feeding tube, and might have long-term cognitive deficits. It was a scary time.



Emma then

At Johns Hopkins, Emma received plasma infusions, which helped to stabilize her condition and stop her immune system from attacking her brain. The next step was intensive rehabilitation – Emma needed to relearn how to walk, speak, and eat on her own. After spending time in inpatient rehabilitation, Emma shifted to an intensive outpatient model when COVID-19 hit. She went to therapy at MWPH three hours a day, three days a week. Today, she still goes to physical therapy and occupational therapy once a week.



Emma now

“She is improving every year and continues to move forward,” said Emma’s mom, Elena Guzman. “Not only does she walk, speak, and eat on her own, but now she goes on bike rides, swims, and plays.”

Emma, now 11, is working to regain the use of her left arm and to improve her stability and balance. She is homeschooled and is very creative. She loves music and musicals – Mamma Mia and The Greatest Showman are current favorites. She has gotten out of her comfort zone going

sailing, fishing, and skiing as part of Abilities Adventures.

MWPH played a huge role in helping Emma get where she is today. “MWPH gave us a lot of hope. The therapists had so much patience, especially at first. They showed her that she still has the ability to do whatever she wants to do. She just has to put her mind to it.” ♥



EMPLOYEE NEWS

GET TO KNOW OUR STAR EMPLOYEES

The STAR employee award honors those employees who personify our CARES values—Considerate, Attentive, Respectful, Efficient, Safe. These honorees are recognized as outstanding role models in our hospital.

March



Name: Elizabeth Getzoff Testa, PhD (she/her)

Title: Lead psychologist, pediatric psychology; senior pediatric psychologist; coordinator of the MWPH's behavioral pain program; co-coordinator of the psychology externship program at MWPH

Department: Psychology and neuropsychology

How long have you worked at MWPH? I have been at MWPH for over 20 years.

What is your favorite thing about your job? I enjoy helping children and their families overcome challenges in a holistic

way, and I especially love seeing the child grow in confidence over the years as the child develops new skills.

Name one thing that most people don't know about you. I love scuba diving. I have been shark diving, and in high school, I was voted most likely to be the next Jacques Cousteau.

April



Name: Cecilia Jimenez

Title: Speech Language Pathologist

Department: Speech therapy

How long have you worked at MWPH? Three years this summer.

What is your favorite thing about your job? I love the difference that I get to make with all of our patients and all their families, but especially my bilingual Spanish-speaking patients.

Name one thing that most people don't know about you. During my elementary school years, I lived in Mexico, so I obviously learned a lot of Spanish then.

May



Name: Jasmine Jones

Title: Registrar

How long have you worked at MWPH? I joined MWPH as a patient care assistant in 2018 and later worked at the front desk of the Rosenberg Outpatient Center. I have worked in the customer service call center for about a year and occasionally return to help families at Rosenberg.

What is your favorite thing about your job? My coworkers. It is absolutely like a family here. They've embraced my family and me. I just couldn't say anything more about this place because it's so good.

Name one thing that most people don't know about you. I have 15 siblings! Let's just say, it got hectic.

CONGRATULATIONS

DAISY Award Winners:

- Jaimie Regulski, LPN
- Elisabeth Schucker, RN

TULIP Award Winners:

- Dominique Day, PCA
- Jackie Mason, PCA

IRIS Award Winner:

- Brooke Schmelz, OT



Bill signing in Annapolis

On May 20, Governor Wes Moore signed HB1301 into law. Supported by payers, the Maryland Department of Health, and the assembly, the bill—sponsored by Delegate Rosenberg—enables children to transition from acute care to pediatric specialty hospital care without insurance delays. Key contributors included MWPH, University of Maryland Medical System, and Johns Hopkins Medicine. At the signing, Amir, a patient featured at this year's gala, shared a special moment with the governor.

Congrats Top Nurses

MWPH celebrates two "Top Nurses" recognized by *Baltimore* magazine in its 2025 Excellence in Nursing awards:

- Samantha Amedore, RN
- Amanda Morris, MSN, RN, CPN

Amanda and Samantha were honored with this prestigious recognition for their unwavering compassion, dedication, and excellence in nursing. Known for going above and beyond in their daily practice, they consistently provide exceptional care to patients and families, earning the respect and admiration of their peers.

MYTHBUSTERS

Myth busted by: *Hannah Ladouceur, Licensed Graduate Professional Counselor*



MYTH: Using my child's preferred pronouns and/or chosen name may not be an integral part of their mental health treatment.

FACT: Research shows that children who

identify within the LGBTQIA+ community are at increased risk for depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts. All children have a desire to feel safe, loved, and supported by their caregivers. By using your child's preferred pronouns/chosen name, you are providing them with the safety, love, and support necessary to help decrease the risk of negative mental health outcomes LGBTQIA+ youth may experience.

Family support is an important factor in mental health outcomes for children who identify within the LGBTQIA+ community, and adopting a child's pronouns/chosen name is an integral aspect of their mental health treatment, as well as the child's overall safety and well-being.

HERE IS WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Do your best to use your child's preferred pronouns and chosen name.
- Ask your child about their preferred pronouns.
- Do your best to be accepting of your child's gender expression by providing access to clothing, hair styles, etc. that may be more aligned with your child's gender identity.
- Listen, take accountability, and commit to do better when you've made a mistake or misgendered your child.
- Advocate for your child's ability to use preferred pronouns or chosen name in different systems (e.g., school, doctor's offices).
- Do your best to learn about the LGBTQIA+ community. Here are some resources:

■ www.thetrevorproject.org

■ childmind.org

5 MINUTES WITH Brooke Schmelz

Brooke Schmelz, MS, OTR/L, has worked as an occupational therapist at MWPH for about six years. She applies her talents across the hospital, from the inpatient rehabilitation unit to the feeding day program, to the rehab day program, to outpatient rehab. She is also working on a specialty in trauma-informed care.

What brought you to MWPH and your field?

I worked at a school for kids with cerebral palsy after graduating with a degree in psychology. As part of that work, I spent a lot of time with physical, occupational, and speech therapists, and I loved everything the occupational therapists did. I chose to go back to school for occupational therapy, and one of my field work assignments was at MWPH. I kept in touch and applied when there was an opening.

What is the best part of your job? What is the biggest challenge?

My favorite part is being able to work as part of an interdisciplinary team, including physical therapy, speech therapy, recreational therapy, child life, and others, to provide the best care for patients. It's also great to work with kids every day – it can be fun, because we're often using play as an intervention.

The hardest part is balancing the emotional aspect of the job. We're seeing families in the worst moments of their lives.

What kind of impact do you hope to have at MWPH?

I want people to feel good when they're around me, whether it's parents who are having a tough day or team members who need a morale boost. I'm here to support my patients any way that I can – we can see the difference we make here, and that means a lot.

I run a couple of groups with our inpatients, such as a breakfast club to get kids up and ready for the day, and a monthly group with Bata, one of our therapy dogs. I love collaborating with other specialties to provide the kind of personalized care you can't find at other hospitals.



DEPARTMENT SPOTLIGHT

CALL CENTER



The Call Center team and Outpatient registrars work together to best serve our patient families

THE CALL CENTER IS A LIFELINE FOR PATIENT FAMILIES.

They make appointments for patients, handle referral requests, and serve as a key source of information for patient families. They answer calls as well as emails to connect patients with providers.

“We are always fighting for our patients. It could be about getting a medication, getting an earlier appointment, or resolving a problem. We are always advocating on behalf of our patients,” said Shatea Gaines, registrar at MWPH.

“

We know what it's like to be a parent, and we place ourselves in their shoes. We know they're going through a lot, and we give them encouragement and reassurance.

—Shatea Gaines, registrar

”

The team includes four registrars, one of whom is a nurse who takes urgent calls from families, triages symptoms, and answers questions about a child's condition or medications.

This extraordinary group combines highly organized, detail-oriented skills with lots of empathy and love. “We know what it's like to be a parent, and we place ourselves in their shoes. We know they're going through a lot, and we give them encouragement and reassurance,” Gaines said.

The call center staff members also have to be detectives at times. “Many times, we have to do some investigating to find out what kind of testing or evaluation the patient needs. We connect with providers to understand what kinds of appointments need to be booked,” said Jasmine Jones, registrar at MWPH. “Then, we can navigate them, ensuring their child's care is heading in the right direction.”

One challenge with the role is dealing with calls from people who are stressed or frustrated. Their role is to help relieve that frustration, which most often stems from worry about their child's well-being. “Most often, people are happy after a phone call and feel like they got something accomplished,” Jones notes.

A strong culture of teamwork in the call center helps alleviate stress. “We work together to figure out how to help families,” Gaines said. “When someone is stressed, it's never personal. They're calling because they need help, and we're here to help them. When you go home and realize that you made someone's life better, it's a great feeling.”

Overall, the job of the call center is so much more than booking appointments. They build relationships, they solve problems, and they are the first point of contact for families. They're truly the institution's heartbeat. ♥

THE CALL CENTER TEAM

Dawnae Merez, registrar

El-Shawna Alston, registrar

Jasmine Jones, registrar

JoAnne Wilson, RN

Shatea Gaines, registrar

Get to Know MWPH's Vizient Nurse Residency Program

Our nurses are central to MWPH's ability to provide outstanding care. That's why our hospital devotes significant time and resources to ensuring our nurses are equipped with the tools they need to succeed. One of those tools is the Vizient nurse residency program.

Vizient partners with the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) to lead this standardized program for new-graduate nurses. MWPH has run the program for several years with new-graduate RNs, and in 2024, the program expanded to include new-graduate LPNs as well.

"As soon as they complete the licensing process and get those credentials added to their names, we expect them to assume the persona of a nurse and take on all of these responsibilities at once," said Amanda Morris, MSN, RN, CPN, nursing professional development specialist at MWPH. "The Vizient nurse residency is designed to ease that transition."

What does the Vizient nurse residency entail?

MWPH hires 10 to 15 new-graduate nurses each year. This 12-month program is geared toward supporting these individuals as they transition from student to professional nurse. During the residency, the cohort of new graduates attends half-day or full-day meetings and workshops each month to focus on relevant topics and gain support from each other.

The residency enables new-graduate RNs and LPNs to:

- Hone critical thinking and communication skills
- Gain pediatric and neonatal-specific training that they don't get in nursing school
- Develop their professional identity – who they are as an RN or LPN and what that means to the profession
- Refine advanced clinical skills with support from an educator



- Work on a performance improvement or evidence-based practice project to develop research skills and make an impact on the organization
- Learn from content experts throughout the hospital

MWPH's program collaborates with an advisory board and partners with a local nursing school representative, content experts, nurse leaders, a medical staff member, and nurse educators – to guide the program. The residency program is continuously evolving and improving to meet our new nurses' needs and set them up for long-term success as a nurse and at MWPH. ❤️

MWPH: IN THE COMMUNITY



Welcome LaSandra Cousins, MWPH's New Director of Community Benefit

We are thrilled to welcome LaSandra Cousins to MWPH as our new director of community benefit. She joined the team on May 5 and brings with her a deep commitment to public health, health equity, and community engagement.

Cousins will lead our community health strategy in collaboration with partners at the University of Maryland Medical System and Johns Hopkins Medicine. She will oversee community education, outreach, benefit reporting, and compliance efforts, while also leading the MWPH's Community Health Advisory Board and working closely with the health equity officer and the EDI council.

Previously, Cousins served as public health program director at the Family Health Council of Central PA, managing a \$15 million budget and advancing health initiatives across the region. She holds degrees from Duquesne and Millersville universities, along with certifications in nonprofit management and DEI.

Please join us in giving LaSandra Cousins a warm MWPH welcome!



Patient Parent Perspective

Claire Leocha



Claire Leocha and Ryan Malvey are parents to two boys: proud big brother Rhys, who is 7 years old, and little brother Calan, who was born in January 2024 at just 27 weeks' gestation.

While she was pregnant with Calan, Claire was diagnosed with placenta previa and placenta accreta. He was followed by fetal cardiology because of a rare fetal vascular anomaly that increases the risk of congenital defects to the heart, gastrointestinal tract, and facial structure.

How did your family first connect with MWPH?

Calan spent the first six weeks of his life at the University of Maryland Medical Center, followed by another six weeks at

MWPH to feed and grow. He was discharged home on April 8, the day before his predicted due date. Today, Calan is thriving, and it's hard to believe he weighed just two pounds when he was born.

What services has your family received at MWPH?

He was initially followed in several of MWPH's outpatient clinics, but now he only needs to come in once a year for follow-up. He was seen in MWPH's head clinic to evaluate his head shape and determine whether he needed a helmet to correct plagiocephaly.

What stands out about MWPH?

The thing I appreciated the most was that the staff acknowledged the reality of our situation. We live on the Eastern Shore, so it wasn't easy to make the trip to MWPH. The staff was so welcoming and understanding. They were also great with Rhys. The occupational therapy team always had him select a book to read to Calan when he visited.

What advice do you have for families coming to MWPH for the first time?

I was nervous with the discharge from the University of Maryland Medical Center — an acute care facility — to MWPH because it felt like an unknown. I encourage families to keep an open mind. You can visit, connect with the team, and ask the questions you have. They're there to help and support you, just as they are with your child. It's a big step to move from the neonatal intensive care unit to MWPH, but it's well worth it.

10th Annual Storybook Gala was a Magical Success!

The 10th Annual Storybook Gala, presented by Mandy, Dennis, Dillon and Benjamin Weinman, was a magical evening of generosity and celebration!

A heartfelt thank you to our Gala Chair, Kate Cohen, for her inspiring vision and leadership that brought this event to life. Highlights of the evening included inspiring words from our Chair and CEO, lively auction packages, a powerful patient story and most importantly, vital funds raised to support MWPH and the kids we serve!



For information or questions about *Handprints*, contact **Katie Yeager**, Communications Manager at katharine.yeager@mwph.org



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An affiliate of University of Maryland Medical System and Johns Hopkins Medicine

Handprints is a publication of the Development department for MWPH's patient families, staff and the community.

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- Follow us on YouTube
- Follow us on Instagram @mwphstories
- Connect with us on LinkedIn