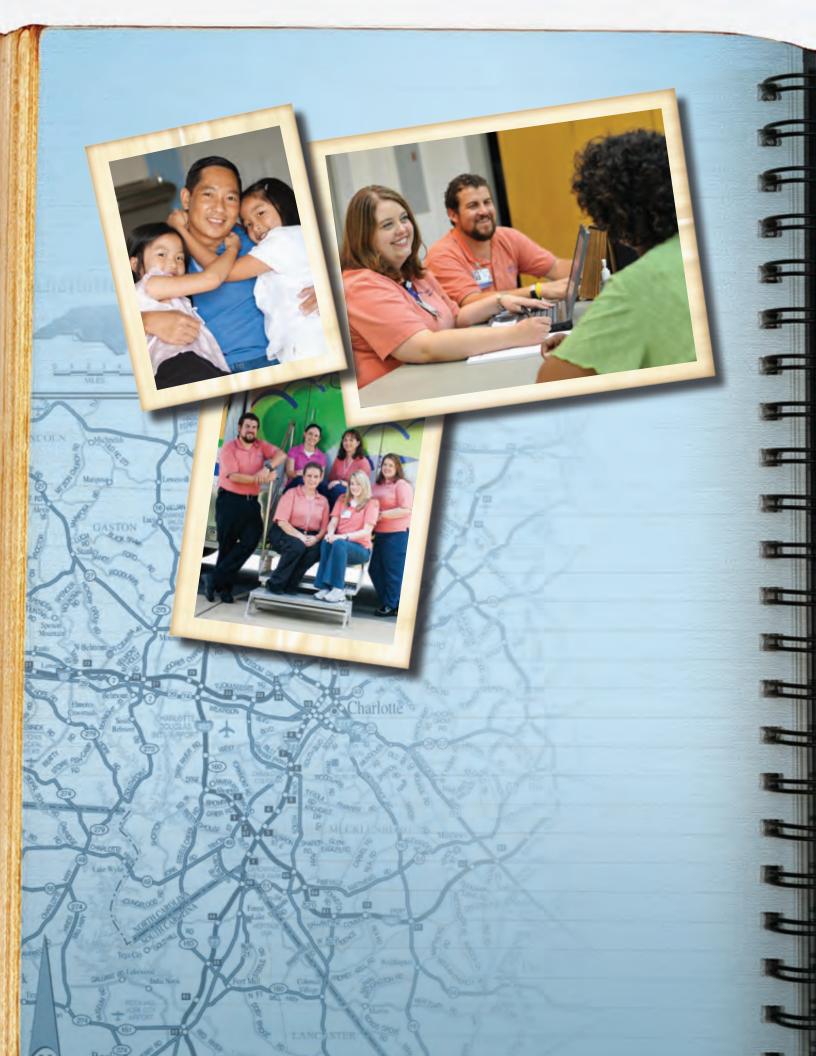


A collection of lives changed and memories made on the Presbyterian Hospital Community Care Cruiser





Imagine having a sick child.



Their eyes are red from the tears that stain their face, and their body is limp and devoid of its familiar energy. You feel your heart breaking because you know you can't do anything about it.

Now imagine you're uninsured and the money you do have won't even come close to covering a costly doctor's bill. Low on options and hope, you hug your child and tell them everything will be OK.

But even you aren't so sure.

Then the Community Care Cruiser enters

the picture, and for the first time in a long time you don't feel like you're navigating your family's health alone. This mobile health clinic and its dedicated staff encounter countless families like you who are trying to do the best for their children but are falling short due to circumstance. Some are insured and some aren't, but all feel they have failed their children because they can't provide the fundamental gift of health.

A quick checkup and a prescription later, your child is on the road to recovery.

And as you breathe a sigh of relief you find that you, too, were cared for by the Cruiser –

you were given medicine for the soul.

The pages that follow reveal stories of despair turning into hope, uncertainty fading into strength, and gratitude jumping into action. They also reveal something delightfully powerful about human nature:

When you strip away the layers, we all really want the same thing in life – for our kids to have a happy, healthy future.





Jumping for Joy



My husband and I are the proud parents of three children: Monserath, 11; Emilio, 3; and Ximena, 2. We love them all very dearly from the bottom of our hearts. Our youngest two children have significant health concerns; Emilio, like his father, has a bleeding disorder, and Ximena has severe allergies that cause her to get sick a lot.

Emilio and Ximena require a lot of care. It's hard to split my time and give both of them the attention they need. My husband works as a landscaper and does everything in his power to support the children and me. Unfortunately, we have been faced with a lot of health issues, and even though my husband earns a decent amount of money it is not enough to cover all the medical bills for our children.

Because of our financial situation, my husband refuses to go to the doctor when he is sick, which can be very dangerous with his blood disease. But he knows that every dollar he uses for himself will be missing when the next medical bill comes for our children. Seeing the person I love

risk his health to take care of his family rips at my heart, but there is nothing I can do.

I've stopped counting how often I have to take Ximena to the doctor for the flu, a cold or bronchitis. Our last doctor's visit cost \$300. Since Ximena and Monserath are both ineligible for Medicaid,

each doctor's visit adds up to much more than my husband and I can afford.

One of the ladies at the local community center told me about the Cruiser. I was very happy to hear about its services but didn't fully comprehend how much of an impact it would have on the life of my family.

The day of our first visit I was very surprised by how kind and sensitive the staff was to what my children had been through; they cared for them at a level unsurpassed by anyone else.

Ximena is a very active girl and loves to play outside with her older brother. It's that same energy that gets the two of them in trouble. Before visiting the Cruiser, I couldn't allow her to play outside without being afraid that she'd get very sick. Since our first visit, however, my daughter's life has greatly improved. She received the care and even the medication she needed to play outside like other kids and do the things that made her happy.

My husband and I do everything we can to keep our kids healthy — it's more important than anything else.

But without money for health insurance, if it weren't for the Cruiser our children would likely have to wait until they were gravely ill to get the medical care they need.

Knowing the Cruiser is available has lifted a weighty burden from my husband's shoulders and has given me peace of mind to be a happy mom. Now I know if my children get sick there is a place I can go to where they will receive great care and not have to suffer.







Family Ties

My name is Elizabeth Keilhack, and I am the nurse on the Community Care Cruiser. Before I began my journey on the Cruiser, I worked as a pediatric nurse at Hemby Children's Hospital. It was there that I met 16-year-old Brian and his family. A leukemia patient, he had come to the United States with his parents and three younger brothers for treatment.

Brian was one of my assigned cancer patients, and what stood out about him was that he had a contagious smile and always seemed happy, despite the treatments that made him very sick. Even though we didn't speak the same verbal language, we got by with our own special sign language and managed to joke around

most of the time. To this day he remains one of the sweetest and funniest people I have ever met.

I began working on the Cruiser not too long after Brian completed treatment and left the children's hospital. Imagine my surprise when I saw his family walk through the Cruiser doors several months later! As soon as they saw my familiar face they started to smile. It turns out they remembered me as well as I remembered them! The reason for today's visit, however, wasn't for Brian; it was for their second son, Denny.

At first we didn't know what was wrong with Denny. He showed some unusual symptoms but nothing concrete: difficulty walking, frequent falls and loss of bladder control. Further evaluation raised concerns that these symptoms could be due to a neurological problem or even cancer, so we admitted him to the hospital. Shortly after being admitted he was diagnosed with a urological problem and prescribed surgery to correct it.

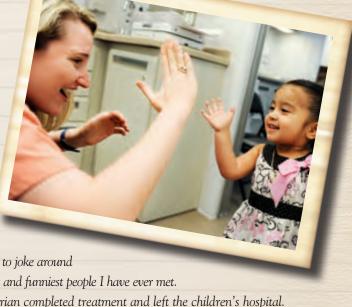
Six months later the family called again. This time they were concerned about their third son, Joshua. By this time he had had a fever for 10 days, so we advised the family to go to the emergency room.

Four days and an ER visit later, the family came though our doors because Joshua was still sick. After a lengthy examination, the only explanation the nurse practitioner and I had was Kawasaki disease, a rare inflammatory condition that causes severe heart damage if left untreated. Though Joshua's symptoms were very vague, we didn't want to risk underreacting, so we sent him to Hemby for more tests. Later that day we received a phone call from the hospital. Diagnosis confirmed – Kawasaki disease.

We visited Joshua a number of times during his weeklong stay in the hospital. Each time, his parents would profusely thank us and tell us that they don't know what they would have done without the Cruiser. To be honest, I'm not sure what they would have done either, and I shudder to think how severe the consequences could have been.

Stories like this family's are exactly why I do my job. I believe that making children's futures brighter makes everyone's future brighter, and I know that the gift of health is something I will never take for granted again.





Elizabeth



A Recipe with Heart



My name is Blanca Mendez. For 13 years my husband and I have lived in Charlotte with our two children and our dog, Rusty. My daughter, Rebecca, is 23, and her little brother, Marcos, is 16. They're both great kids with a bright future ahead of them.

Years ago the only healthcare option for my family was urgent care. It was very expensive, so we only went if we really had to. One day my priest told me about the Presbyterian Hospital Community Care Cruiser, and I decided to try it for Marcos since he had a bad cold at the time.

A wave of nerves hit me before walking in; I realized I didn't know these people or have any idea what to expect! My fears were quickly

relieved, however, as the Cruiser team welcomed us with open arms into the clinic. It was obvious that they all love what they do, and they shared that feeling with everyone who came through the doors.

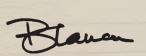
During the intake process, Patricia, the social worker, asked if my family had any other needs the Cruiser may be able to meet. I felt so comfortable that I told her about my son's heart condition he had suffered from since birth. Patricia did some research and recommended a cardiologist, who was able to get him all the tests he needed to ensure he stayed healthy.

The Cruiser team also connected us with Physicians Reach Out for additional services and even let my husband and I know of places we could go to receive care. I had no idea so many resources were available!

I was so touched by the Cruiser's outpouring of support that I decided I wanted to do something to say thanks and asked my sister-in-law to help me organize a surprise party at my church. I cooked all the dishes myself: empanadas, paella, fresh fruit and cheesecake with strawberry sauce for dessert. We decorated the tables with flowers, and I bought a small gift for each person.

When the Cruiser team arrived to set up for another day out in the community, I opened the door and revealed their special tribute. Almost everyone started to cry; the team was so bewildered and touched by our gesture.

From that day on I have tried to bake a cake to celebrate each Cruiser team member's birthday. I do it not only to celebrate these special days with them but to also show them that I won't forget what they did for my family and what that means to me. I honestly don't know what I would have done without them.





The Ripple Effect

From the time I was a little girl, all I ever wanted to be was a nurse. And while my path through nursing school had its share of challenges, fast-forward to today and I am living out my dream as the coordinator of the Presbyterian Hospital Community Care Cruiser.

In my role I have the unique opportunity to connect families with our services for the first time. Oftentimes the voices on the other end of the phone sound a somber mix of dejection, anxiety and shame. They've already halfway talked themselves out of calling because they've been turned away from everywhere else and have no reason to expect anything different from us. And then I say the magic words, "We can help," and their lives immediately change for the better.

I recently spoke with a woman who shared a similar plight.

A mother of two young children and a guardian to two younger siblings, this compassionate spirit was out of work and out of options to get her child a vaccine to enroll in school. When I told her, "Yes, we can help and we can do it for free," she began to weep. The relief poured out in the form of tears on her face.

I had the pleasure of meeting this young woman at one of our sites. She recognized my voice, immediately ran up with a bear-hug embrace and began to weep again. To be lifted up from feeling like a failure as a parent is overwhelming.

This mom's story and the many others like hers change you. You can't help but change who you are, how you feel and what you think after seeing the human side of struggle. And no matter what people believe politically or socially, one thing we can all agree on is that parents generally want to give everything they have to their kids – to leave nothing behind, position them in a better place.

I know without a doubt the Cruiser has changed me. Some days I leave feeling happy because of the great work we've been able to do and other times I leave feeling sad because of all the work that still needs to be done. However at the end of every day I leave knowing I've made a difference—you can't ask for better job satisfaction than that!

I truly am part of something that's bigger than me.

When it's all said and done, I believe in the ripple effect of kindness. Someone will hear our story and be inspired to donate. That donation will help us give immunizations to school-age kids in need. Those immunizations will prevent the spread of disease, keeping classrooms healthy and kids in school. One

of those kids may grow up and be inspired to give back, just like the Cruiser did for him.

And to think, that one little ripple – that one act of kindness – never imagined it could make a wave.







Connect Four!

As a mother of four, I feel it's incredibly important to stay connected to resources that can help keep you and your family healthy. That's why I signed up to be a congregational health promoter through Presbyterian Hospital. This volunteer program trains people in the community to be health liaisons for their congregation, sharing information about available resources and providing tips for wellness.

As part of my training I learned about the Presbyterian Hospital Community Care Cruiser and was thrilled to find out that one of the sites, The Solomon House, was in my community! Soon after I learned about this new resource I was able to check it out for myself, as my eldest daughter, Adrianna, was sick and required care for sickle cell disease.

ith the long lines at free clinics and of the other kids and adults in need of medical attention. Much

Since my family is uninsured, we're familiar with the long lines at free clinics and were mentally prepared to wait our turn among all of the other kids and adults in need of medical attention. Much to my surprise, we were welcomed upon our arrival and were given all the time in the world as if we were the only ones there that day! You could tell the staff only works with kids; they're so good at making them feel comfortable.

All of my kids – my youngest daughter, Victoria, and my twin boys, Alexander and Adriano – have now been to see the Cruiser. We go for everything – from sick visits, to physicals, vaccines and resource referrals! And I can't even begin to explain how helpful the staff was with my daughter's sickle cell diagnosis. They asked more questions than I ever could have thought of, ensuring that we have all the information we need at our fingertips should a crisis ever occur.

As a mom, the Cruiser has brought me a sense of relief. Before it came around I would try to self-treat at home, but if that didn't work I felt like my hands were tied. I now know I have a place I can take my kids if they're sick. The ability to receive medicine that I otherwise could not have afforded helps them get well quickly and not miss a beat at school.

Now that I've seen firsthand what the Cruiser can do,
I'm even more passionate about promoting its services to the
community. Maintaining your health is part of the balance, just
like eating, playing and practicing your religion. The Cruiser
gives people who were forced to live an imbalanced lifestyle an
opportunity to be healthy again. That's a message I'm proud to share!





Curveballs

Sometimes life throws you curveballs. Like when my first child, Makayla, was born nine years ago. Before I could even get used to her warm, pudgy body in my arms, she was being whisked away to the sterile confines of an incubator, hooked up to machines and fighting for her young life. Three weeks later she came out on top, but the lung infection had left its mark — a childhood of precautions and, at times, avoidance.

My husband and I had our second child, Dylan, three years later. Our family of four was getting along just fine; that is, until I lost my job. The security blanket of insurance got ripped right out from under us, and we found ourselves facing the uncomfortable situation of being uninsured because we couldn't afford the Cobra coverage through my former employer.

For a year we crossed our fingers, said our prayers and avoided any situation that could possibly cause one of us – especially the kids – to get sick. Miraculously, everyone stayed healthy, and it wasn't until Dylan required immunizations for kindergarten that I was once again reminded of our dire healthcare situation. Back-to-school shots and physicals would total \$800 for both kids; we couldn't afford that!

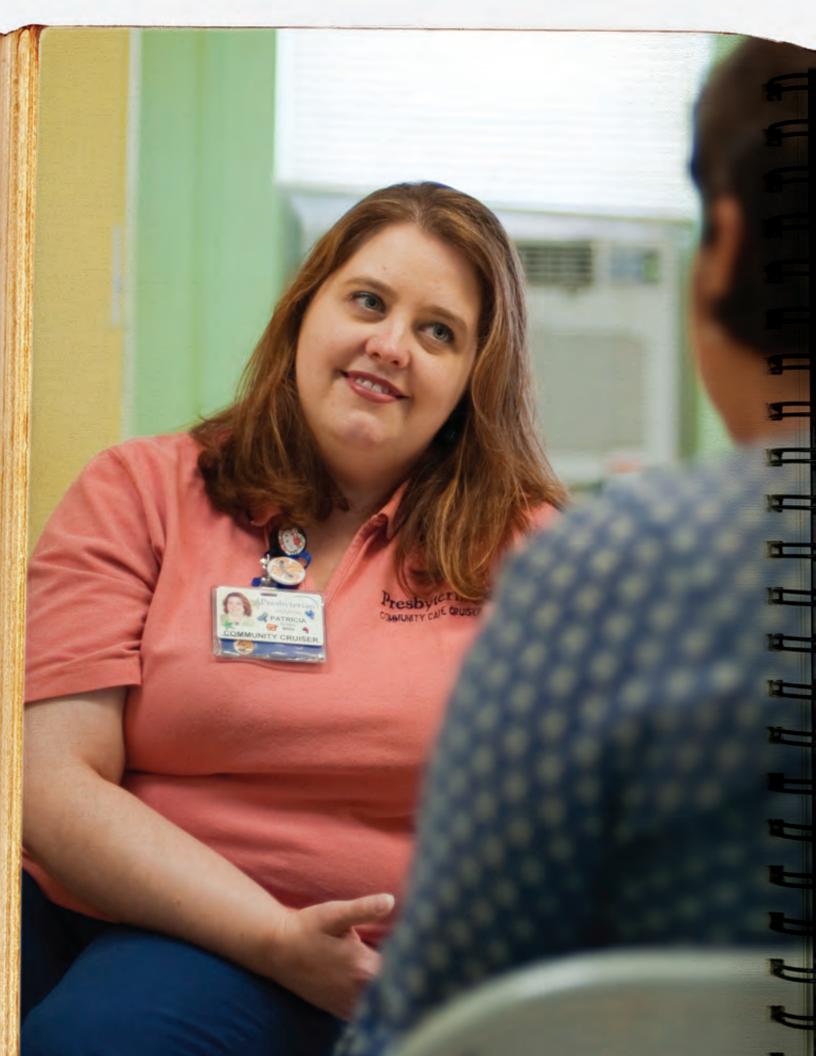
After a few phone calls I learned about the Presbyterian Hospital Community Care Cruiser and decided to check it out. To be honest, my expectations were low. I assumed it to be dingy and dim, crowded with lines of desperate people and served by gruff, unhappy staff. My, how I couldn't have been more wrong! We instead were greeted by warm smiles and a staff who made you feel like you were the only one there that day. Both my children received immunizations and physicals, and Makayla even got medicine to tackle her cold – I was beyond blown away!

From that day forward we formed a bond with the Cruiser team. Whether we just called in or came for a visit, they provided us with countless unexpected considerations that removed the financial and emotional "what ifs" of how to get care for a sick, uninsured child.

I can't even begin to explain the sense of helplessness I had felt before I found the Cruiser. It really made me question my motherhood; I couldn't stomach the thought of my child having to suffer because we lacked access to care.

Thanks to the Cruiser, our kids are now more fully able to enjoy being kids. Before, I shied away from signing the kids up for sports because I knew we couldn't financially afford for them to get sick or injured. Now that I know we have a health ally in our corner, Makayla has become an enthusiastic cheerleader, and Dylan enjoys tearing up the football field. Their good physical health has alleviated a heavy burden for my husband and me, and now we're able to focus on more than just financial concerns. That peace of mind is priceless, and we owe it all to the Cruiser.





The Pulse of Information

As the social worker on the Presbyterian Hospital Community Care Cruiser, I know firsthand that sometimes people just need someone to listen to their story, and sometimes a piece of information is all it takes to make a difference in someone's life.

In my role I perform complete psychosocial assessments, looking at the family as a whole and not just at the medical history of the child. Through my conversations with the parents I try to learn more about the family and get a better understanding of where they are coming from so that I can connect them with resources they need.

This was the second time Maria had brought her son to the Cruiser. As usual, I asked her if there was anything else I could help her with or that was troubling her, and Maria used the opportunity to pour her heart out to me. She told me her mother was visiting from out of the country, and within 24 hours she had a massive heart attack and was rushed to Presbyterian Hospital where she had open heart surgery. Since the grandmother was just visiting and was not a

U.S. citizen, she did not have health insurance to help foot the bill.

Already, the bills had started accumulating. Few people can afford a six-figure hospital tab, and Maria was no exception.

While I listened to her story, Presbyterian Hospital's charity care program came to mind. This program was created for those who cannot afford medical care due to extraordinary circumstances in their lives, and Maria was a perfect candidate.

A couple of months passed before Maria came to see me at one of our sites. That day she walked into the waiting area, stopped in front of me and handed me an envelope. As I opened the envelope my eyes met hers, and at that moment we both burst into tears. The envelope contained a letter explaining that the entire cost of Maria's mom's surgery and hospital stay was paid 100 percent by the charity care program.

That moment has since been imprinted in my brain as the shining reason why I am here: to help people alleviate stress and get to a better place where they don't have to worry so much.

After a short recovery, Maria's mother was able to return home. I see the family from time to time when they come to the Cruiser for care. One day Maria told me that if her mother knew how much the surgery cost she would probably have another heart attack!

To know that the small piece of information I provided the family made a huge impact in their life is a great feeling. Our organization was able to provide medical services for the son, ease the mother's mind and save the grandmother's life. I feel so blessed to say it's all in a day's work for me.

Patricia





Gooaall!!!

My name is Diana and I am 15 years old. When I was younger, I never understood why my dad watched soccer on TV, especially when I wanted to watch cartoons at the same time.

One afternoon I saw a guy playing with a soccer ball in the street. He kicked the ball from one foot to the other, and then he caught the ball with his hands. It seemed so easy when he did it. I was really impressed and wanted to be able to do the same, so I started to play by myself. I wasn't any good because I didn't know how to kick the ball so that it went the direction I

wanted it to go. But that didn't stop me; it was so much fun!

When my family and I moved into a new apartment I began playing with people from the neighborhood. With time I got better and better, and I even learned some dodges!

I told my parents I wanted to play for the school soccer team. In order to do so, however, I needed a sports physical. This posed a problem because I did not have any insurance, and money was tight because my parents had to pay for the care of my older sister, my younger brother and me. I am not sure how my mom found out about the Cruiser, but one day she told me about it and that she thought they could help me get the physical I needed.

I was scared before my first visit because I had no idea how the Cruiser staff would react when I showed up. But as I walked into the room everybody started to smile and was so sweet to me that my uncertainty and fear immediately washed away.

The way the Cruiser team treated me was very different from what I had experienced when I went to the hospital with my mom. They didn't try to rush us through, even though other people were waiting outside. They also had a great attitude, and I could feel that they really cared about me and all the other children.

After Beth, the Cruiser nurse practitioner, checked all my vital signs and made sure I was fit enough to play soccer, they handed me the sports physical. I was so happy! Finally, I could be part of the school soccer team! The Cruiser helped me do what I love most – play soccer – and I cannot even begin to explain how much that means to me.

Soccer keeps me busy and out of trouble. When I am bored I just go outside and kick the ball. Soccer is my passion, and if it didn't exist then I would be the one to invent it! When I grow up I want to be a professional soccer player and play for my country as a member of their national team. I thank the Cruiser for paving the way to making my dreams come true.







Steady in a World of Change

In recent years I've learned that even when you think you're prepared for change, you're not.

After getting divorced in 2007, I found myself having to move with my child, Kaylee, into my parents' house. I found a job with a small business, but it didn't offer health benefits and I couldn't afford them on my own. At just above the poverty line, I made too much money to qualify for government support but not enough to cover me or Kaylee. I had been insured my entire life and never worried about healthcare. In my wildest dreams, I did not think this could happen to me.

I stayed in a stressed-out and emotional state. I was worried about Kaylee. Now that I was alone how could I support her so that she had everything she needed to live a happy and healthy life?

Kaylee is my only child and means the world to me, so every time she got sick I immediately panicked. Sometimes I had no other choice than to go to the doctor and was fortunate to have financial support from friends and family so that I could pay for care.

By chance, my mom received a flier about the Presbyterian Hospital Community Care Cruiser and told me I should check it out. I wasn't convinced; everywhere else had said I made too much money, so why would the Cruiser be any different? I was embarrassed and ashamed. In the Cruiser parking lot I thought about what would happen if they turned me away. What would I do and where would I take Kaylee?

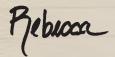
As it turns out, I was pleasantly surprised by how well we were treated. The Cruiser team never made me feel like I shouldn't be there. In fact, they were very kind and took the time to talk to my daughter so that she felt comfortable after just a few minutes. They even offered her a flu vaccine – that really meant a lot to me.

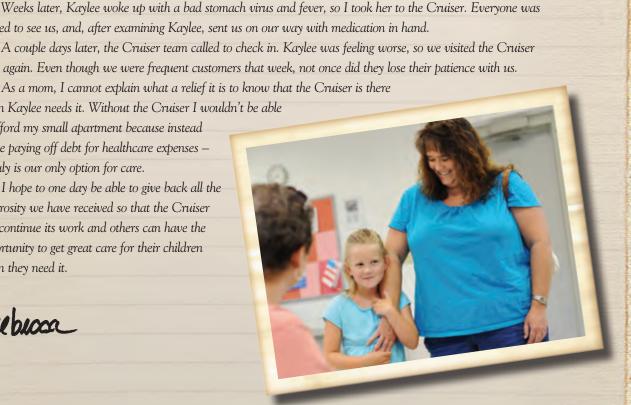
Weeks later, Kaylee woke up with a bad stomach virus and fever, so I took her to the Cruiser. Everyone was excited to see us, and, after examining Kaylee, sent us on our way with medication in hand.

A couple days later, the Cruiser team called to check in. Kaylee was feeling worse, so we visited the Cruiser once again. Even though we were frequent customers that week, not once did they lose their patience with us.

when Kaylee needs it. Without the Cruiser I wouldn't be able to afford my small apartment because instead I'd be paying off debt for healthcare expenses it truly is our only option for care.

I hope to one day be able to give back all the generosity we have received so that the Cruiser can continue its work and others can have the opportunity to get great care for their children when they need it.







Soaring to New Heights

As the nurse practitioner on the Presbyterian Hospital Community Care Cruiser, I'm affected by my patients' health and happiness. I love every single kid I see and I get frustrated when I have difficulty connecting them with needed resources. However, when everything falls into place, I feel like I am contributing to small miracles.

One of these miracles is Anayeli. She was 8 years old when I first saw her and her mom on the Cruiser. The little girl had spina bifida and was paralyzed from the waist down. Her visit was not for her disability but instead a burn on her leg; her little brother accidentally had spilled hot soup on her.

Anayeli and her parents already had visited the emergency room but, after several days and no improvement, they needed other options. Knowing the family's limited resources, Anayeli's school nurse led them to the Cruiser.

I learned the family had been through a lot. Two of their three children have major health issues — Anayeli, the oldest, is wheelchair-bound due to her disease, and 3-year-old Viktor is profoundly autistic. Mom's full-time job is to care for the kids. Dad supports the family monetarily, but the cost of his children's extensive health needs extends beyond his paycheck. The family was on the brink of homelessness. It broke my heart, and I knew I had to help.

Close inspection of Anayeli's leg revealed a third-degree burn. The skin was gone, putting her at high risk of infection and requiring hospitalization. Add spina bifida to the mix, and you have a burn that is very difficult to heal.

The plastic surgeon confirmed our fears: The severe burn required treatment at a specialty hospital. Mom and Dad tried to figure out logistics but couldn't find a hospital that would treat their child due to their lack of money and insurance. I knew if no one intervened Anayeli easily could go home to die. I called every east coast hospital I could find and finally found a hospital in Ohio that agreed to help Anayeli and her family. Now I had to arrange transportation.

After five days and countless hours filling out grant applications, I convinced Angel Flights, a nonprofit organization that provides free medical flights, to transport Anayeli to Ohio.

Anayeli could not feel the severity of her burn. Instead, she saw her trip as an adventure. While boarding, she excitedly said, "I am going on a plane and I am outta here!" Before takeoff, Angel Flights snapped a photo of Anayeli's family with the pilot.

The family was very grateful for everything we did. Their thank-you cards still sit on my desk. We've seen them a few times since, and Anayeli is doing fine. She loves to take her Angel Flights picture to school to impress the other kids.

I know I would have done anything for Anayeli. This family had been put down for being poor and having handicapped children, but on the Cruiser none of that mattered. Honestly, without the Cruiser or the parents' keen interest in the well-being of their children, I think Anayeli would have fallen through the cracks.







Other Duties as Unassigned



As the mobile outreach specialist, I view it as my job to fix things. My role differs from most of the others on the team; I am responsible for both clinical and logistical elements of care, and I enjoy the balance of checking in patients and driving the Cruiser safely to and from our sites across town.

While I embrace the tactical aspects of my role, I find that the most rewarding moments come from those "other duties as unassigned" opportunities where I truly get to make a difference in someone's day. So many of the families we see on the Cruiser are facing difficult circumstances. If there's something I can do to help, I can't imagine not making the effort to do so.

It was a normal day out on the Cruiser. I welcomed new patients and checked their vitals, and in between I told jokes to keep the mood light. (That's my other job: unofficial team clown.) I remember meeting a mom and her three kids who had come to the Cruiser for the first time. They were new to the area and seemed relieved to hear our services existed, as the son required immediate diabetic care. Their situation made me pause while I considered how stressful it must be to navigate healthcare in a new city, with no resources at your fingertips.

With the paperwork completed, I escorted the family of four to the nurse on the Cruiser. From there I returned to my post at patient check-in. As things wound down toward the end of the day, I began cleaning and tying up loose ends to prepare for our departure.

Time passed, and I realized I hadn't seen the family of four pop back through the bright orange doors. "Where are they?" I wondered. "They've been in there a while." Turns out that the boy's condition required a subspecialist referral, so the family was awaiting news of their next step.

Finally, they emerged — visibly tired from the trials of the day, but still overwhelmingly grateful for the care they received and the connections they made. We waved to them as they piled in their car, and we prepared to leave. And then I heard a familiar noise — the sputtering of a car that was too tired to turn on. As I jumped down from the truck I could see Mom's face fall. It was a look I had seen many times on the Cruiser — the look of despair knowing that something was wrong that required dollars to fix.

An amateur repairman, I grabbed a hammer from my tool kit and quickly rolled myself under the car to give the starter a nice, hard thwap. To everyone's relief, the car revved up and Mom and her kids were able to safely make it to an auto repair shop instead of having to pay for towing.

Being able to give back in unexpected ways is what I enjoy most about my job. Sometimes it's a patient form, sometimes an overheating engine, and other times it's a smile that needs to be fixed.





How To Donate



While these stories and the hundreds like them are just the beginning for the Presbyterian Hospital Community Care Cruiser, this book's pages would be blank if it weren't for the benevolence of businesses, foundations and individuals across the community. It is through their collective commitment to children's health that the Cruiser has been able to open its doors and provide medical care to those in need. These groups – Advanced Home Care, Charlotte Bobcats, CVS Caremark, The Duke Endowment, Foundation For The Carolinas, The Children's Medical Fund, Goodrich Foundation, Wachovia Wells Fargo Foundation and Crossroads Charlotte – as well as countless individuals have played a pivotal part in the Cruiser's history.

But what about its future?

Your gifts are needed to help create many more happy endings for underserved children. Many would-be donors ask, "How can my small contribution make a difference?" The truth is that, just as the Cruiser has shown us, no gift is too small when it comes from the heart. On behalf of children in need in our community, please make a gift today.

Please donate to:

Presbyterian Healthcare Foundation

www.presbyterian.org/giving

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