

ImPACT

A newsletter from the
Parent Advisory Council



April 2023

PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL (PAC) BACKGROUND

The Parent Advisory Council (PAC) currently includes parents and caregivers from our Akron and Mahoning Valley (MV) campuses whose children have received care at Akron Children's. Advisors work with hospital liaisons on behalf of other families to enhance the delivery of family-centered care. Parents serve on hospital committees and participate in hospital focus groups and performance-improvement projects. Parents offer support on our program development and policy upgrades. Learn more at akronchildrens.org/PAC.



PATH TO PAC: FEATURING JENNIFER MELIA



What was your path to PAC?

One of our first experiences with Akron Children's was when my son was eight months old. He reacted strongly to something he had ingested, resulting in anaphylaxis and a trip to the emergency room. He was later diagnosed with multiple food allergies, including some that were life threatening. Akron Children's offered us a full healthcare and lifestyle experience on how to care for his needs. His doctor provided an anaphylaxis treatment plan, a meeting with a nutritionist and educators who could advocate and explain his needs thoroughly. After working with the Chronic Care Education Team to educate my son's therapy centers and schools on his severe food allergies, I was referred to PAC by one of the educators. I started in March 2022, so I have been a member for one year.

During that time, my son was referred to the NeuroDevelopmental Science Center (NDSC), where he was diagnosed with autism. His new doctor gave us the resources and connections to help guide us with his new diagnosis. The involvement of the doctors in my son's therapy, education and medical needs has helped us to make the best decisions we can for his development and life.

I am thankful for the opportunity to participate on the PAC committee and give back to the hospital that has given our son and family needed support over the past seven years.

Why do you believe PAC is important?

PAC lends a voice to the community and creates an opportunity for new growth within Akron Children's. It allows families to learn and be involved in the types of programs and care they receive. (Cont.)

PATH TO PAC: FEATURING JENNIFER MELIA (CONT.)

Do you have a favorite PAC memory?

During this past year, my most memorable interaction has been listening to the stories of other PAC members and learning about their journeys and how they became a part of PAC. It's inspiring to hear how others have overcome different obstacles. We all share a common bond: the healthcare and family support we have received through Akron Children's.

If there were no barriers, what would your dream PAC look like (project, service, equipment, etc.)? Dream big!

I would love to see a community garden sponsored by or located at Akron Children's Mahoning Valley, specifically for the kids and families living with or affected by special needs. It would be great to come together, grow beautiful plants and create memories. This space would give kids an opportunity to connect, read, draw or dream with a facilitator or mentor. It would encourage kids that each small seed they plant can grow into something fruitful and to dream big about their futures the same way. Separately, I hope to encourage more education and resources for families living with food allergies in Mahoning Valley.

VIEW FROM THE VALLEY



"Sit!" "Down!" "Stay!" "Come!" These were a few of the commands that handlers gave to their dogs at the Doggie Brigade Evaluation on Saturday, Feb. 25, 2023, at the Mahoning Valley campus. Three teams, comprised of a handler and dog, were evaluated. The rigorous process included aspects of pet care, grooming, and most importantly, scenarios that reflect hospital settings and experiences. Three volunteers assisted the evaluator in these exercises. Pet Partners' therapy animal program is an international organization that registers nine species of therapy animals. Mary Schneider was the volunteer team evaluator at this site.

Handlers use the "P.E.T.S." strategy to reinforce what they want the dog to do without causing the dog undo stress. P.E.T.S. is an acronym for **P**resence, **E**ye contact, **T**ouch and **S**peech. This strategy represents the basic tools handlers use both on- and off-duty to effectively communicate and actively support their therapy animals. Teams volunteer in 2-hour time increments when visiting at the hospital. The animals tend to take stress away from people petting them. The handlers need to know their pets so animals can release that stress before visiting another patient.

Don Bobovnik, a retired school administrator who was one of the volunteers at the evaluation session, said, "This was quite a process! It was amazing to watch the interaction between each handler and dog." Volunteers played the parts of visitors and patients. This gave the dogs ample opportunities to be evaluated in a variety of scenarios (e.g., walking amongst people, reacting to distractions, interacting with angry patients or upset family members, and dealing with a lot of attention from multiple people at once). The handler is expected to advocate for the animal and coach those seeking the dog's attention so all involved are safe from harm.

Mary Schneider says, "We are always looking for more dogs to join the Doggie Brigade." To learn more about the Doggie Brigade, contact Jamie DeMain at [330-746-8350](tel:330-746-8350) at the Mahoning Valley campus or [330-543-8424](tel:330-543-8424) at the Akron campus.

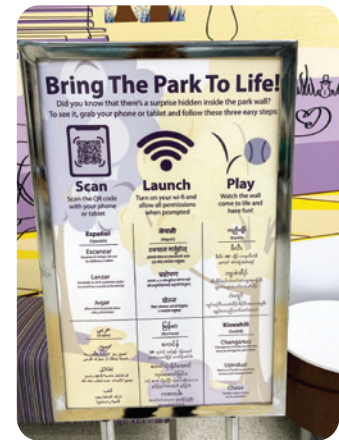
PAC IN ACTION



One of the many ways that PAC partners with the hospital is by providing input and feedback on new projects, spaces, handouts, care sheets and policies. This is an important piece of the *One Team: Patient- and Family-Centered Care* approach that the hospital uses. This collaboration represents the voice of the patients and families the hospital serves. One such project was providing input on the new Spiritual Care Center, which held a dedication on March 14 at the Akron campus. The new Spiritual Care Center is divided into separate areas to better meet the needs of patients, families and staff. Some of the features include a sanctuary with flexible seating to accommodate small services, two private prayer rooms that have ample room for wheelchairs or other adaptive equipment, a children's area, a study featuring a multi-faith library, supplies such as prayer rugs and crosses, office space for chaplaincy services and a conference room for meetings.

PAC and TAG members provided valuable insight as the hospital was building this new space. The feedback included perspectives from different religious beliefs and spiritual backgrounds. PAC member Shawna Roach said, "I felt such a sense of pride seeing the space with many of the PAC recommendations incorporated. One idea was to have various symbols that represent different beliefs prominently displayed so all would feel welcome in the new space."

Another recent project was to test the augmented reality technology for the recent rehabilitation services expansion project. PAC and TAG members tested several versions of this new interactive game that can be seen displayed in the new space. This new technology allows patients to escape the blank hospital walls and enter a fun and interactive environment. PAC and TAG suggested that the directions include several different languages that our patients and families speak.



These may seem like small things, but they go a long way to demonstrate that the hospital listens to our parents and teens as they continue to incorporate PAC member's ideas into these new spaces.



TAG LINE

On Feb. 9, 2023, the Teen Advisory Group partnered with our Akron and Mahoning Valley PAC members to answer the phone lines for the 24th annual *“Have a Heart, Do Your Part”* Radiothon presented by 98.1 WKDD. This year, the radiothon raised \$404,206 to help the patients and families in the communities the hospital serves. Our PAC and TAG team raised nearly \$9,000 during the 90 minutes they covered the phones. “This is my favorite fundraiser, and it was nice to be back in person! I loved calling all my family and friends who make donations every year,” said TAG member Mackenzie Roach. This was the first year that TAG member Olivia Porter had the opportunity to participate and even got a \$1,000 donation. “I loved helping out with the radiothon, and it was great to be part of raising money for the hospital,” Olivia said.

