

## **Riley Hospital for Children Art Therapy Program Description, Purpose and Objectives**

**Description:** Since its founding in 1924, Riley Hospital for Children has embraced a philosophy of Family Centered care, a concept based on mutual respect and collaboration among caregivers and families. Through its dedicated **Child Life Department**, Riley promotes programs that will allow the staff to understand and consider individual patient/family concerns and the challenges they face while in the hospital. Riley staff works hard to involve young patients by giving them a “voice” to enable health care professionals to understand the hospital experience from a child’s point of view. Such Child Life programs are standard in large pediatric centers to address the psychological concerns that accompany illness, injury and hospitalization.

In 2006, Riley Hospital staff undertook a pilot project which allowed a group of patients to work with experienced art therapist Elyce Elder, and Child Life staff members to create artwork that depicted their hospital experience. Creating the art provided the children a “voice” to discuss their hospital experience. Elder interpreted the artwork with the children to clarify what they were thinking and feeling. This project was put into a book, **“Patiently Doctoring”**, which is now being used in family communication courses at the Indiana University School of Medicine.

The Child Life department at Riley feels now is the time to develop a permanent **Art Therapy Program**. Art therapy will complement Child Life programs by further involving young patients and giving them a “voice” to help staff better understand the experience of health care from a child’s perspective. The process of creating art gives children the opportunity to express themselves and teach health care providers more about what is important to them and the issues that trouble them.

An **experienced art therapist** will work with **Riley patients**, often **one-on-one**, who are showing signs of depression and/or anxiety about their illness or their hospital experience. Often a sick child sees his life as threatened, with nowhere to go for solace or hope, and he may have trouble understanding or expressing these fears. Through art therapy the child has an opportunity to express his feelings and also gain a better understanding of his illness. **Even if he /she is very ill, a patient can feel hopeful.**

Often, the way children communicate about their illness is determined by whether or not their **parents** are comfortable talking about it. They often think they are protecting their children by saying, “Don’t worry. Everything is going to be okay.” But, in reality, when children aren’t encouraged to express their concerns, they can feel even more afraid. In these cases, the art therapist will work with the entire family to understand that when a child receives answers to his fears within the context of a trusted relationship, he/she will feel better even if the illness is very serious.

**Purpose of Riley's Art Therapy Program:** Through art therapy a sick child will have a "voice" to help health care providers understand his/her deepest concerns about being sick and in the hospital. Once the art therapist knows the concerns of the patient, the entire family can be part of the therapeutic process. Art therapy can also be practiced in small groups.

**Objectives for Riley's Art Therapy Program**

- Use artwork produced by Riley patients to open a dialogue with an experienced art therapist about the fears and concerns patients may have about their illnesses and hospitalization.
- Develop more hopeful feelings in the patients through artwork and communication with an art therapist.
- Work with the patients' families to learn open, honest communication techniques.

**Riley's Art Therapy Program Steering Committee**

Riley's Art Therapy Program Steering Committee, co-chaired by Carla Leppert and Dr. Rosemary Steinmetz, was formed in January 2008, to consider raising funds for an art therapy program at Riley Hospital for Children. Their orientation has included presentations by Dr. Ora Pescovitz, President and CEO of Riley Hospital for Children; Dr. Paul Haut, Director of Riley's Pediatric Stem Cell Transplant Program; Sheila Smith RN, Director of Riley's Child Life Department; Tracy Councill, MA, Director of Tracy's Kids Program at Georgetown University Medical Center; and Dana Shank, mother of Alexa Shank, who lost a two-year battle to leukemia in September 2007. Through their orientation process and their own personal experiences with critically ill children, the committee has become passionate about the importance of the creative arts in the healing process.

**Goals for Riley's Art Therapy Program**

The Art Therapy committee's initial goal is to raise funds for Riley Hospital for Children to have at least one full-time art therapist for four years. Credentials include a master's degree in art therapy. Annual salary, including benefits, is approximately \$57,460\*. The committee would also like to ensure the future of the Riley's Art Therapy Program by endowing one full-time art therapy position with \$1.2 million.

\*Riley Hospital's Child Life Department researched the current salaries of art therapists.