

Good News Department

Shriners Hospitals Physical Therapy Department Helps Children Reach Their Potential

(NAPSA)—Destinee Richardson's eyes light up as she walks into a brightly colored room full of toys at the Houston Shriners Hospitals for Children. Wasting no time, she sticks a yellow circle onto a window. The 14-month-old bends her knees, reaches for a red heart and does the same as she laughs with her physical therapist, Janet Dawson.

She has worked with Janet since she was almost 3 weeks old and diagnosed with arthrogryposis, which causes multiple joint contractures at birth. Destinee's legs were positioned in extreme hip flexion with her feet over her shoulders and her knees only bent to 40 degrees.

Dr. Douglas Barnes, an expert in arthrogryposis and assistant chief of staff at Houston's Shriners Hospital for Children, worked with Janet to organize a physical therapy program for Destinee. Currently, she is standing with braces and walking.

Fun and Games

Because convincing a child to perform awkward and painful exercises is easier said than done, physical therapists at Shriners Hospital have a few tricks up their sleeves. From Barney to bubble-making machines, the physical therapy department is loaded with toys and activities for active toddlers and older children.

Cute toys will not work for 18-year-old Jesus Escamilla, however, who knows he will experience pain during his physical therapy visits. Jesus suffers from proximal femoral focal deficiency and fibular hemimelia, causing



At Shriners Hospitals, the bond between patients and caregivers is an important part of treatment.

his right leg to be shorter than the left. Surgeons fitted Jesus in a device to help lengthen the leg and he comes to therapy to maintain motion in his knee.

A Family Affair

In addition to encouraging children to complete their physical therapy regimens, the physical therapists at Shriners work heavily with patient families. For instance, Felicia Peters came to Shriners Hospital seeking treatment for her son, Isaiah, who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. Janet helped Isaiah work on his range of motion and his ability to stand on one foot and climb stairs. Another challenge for Janet was to ease Felicia's anxiety about Isaiah's condition and the potential of undergoing surgery.

"I was terrified when they suggested a surgery that required 10 to 12 incisions and kept thinking about how hard it would be for a 5-year-old to take," said Felicia.

"But the physical therapy team felt Isaiah was ready."

The physical therapy team worked closely with Isaiah after his surgery, strengthening the bond between Shriners and the Peters family. Felicia says, the self-confidence Isaiah gained during his sessions allows him to try new activities, despite some of his physical challenges.

Making the Connection

"The children work so hard despite tremendous pain and we do everything we can to make things more manageable," said Janet. "We really get to know them and their families during the time we spend together."

Therapists at Shriners Hospital are rewarded every time they help improve a child's ability to walk and get around, but the emotion is mixed when patients leave. They no longer come on a regular basis yet keep in touch through letters, photographs and visits.

For more information on Shriners' network of 22 hospitals that provide medical care and services totally free of charge to children with orthopaedic problems, burns and spinal cord injuries, write to: Shriners International Headquarters, Public Relations Dept., 2900 Rocky Point Dr., Tampa, FL 33607, or visit the Web site at www.shrinershq.org. Treatment is provided to children under age 18 without regard to race, religion or relationship to a Shriner.

If you know a child Shriners can help, call 1-800-237-5055 in the United States, or 1-800-361-7256 in Canada.