



***Tracy's Kids***  
2023 Annual  
Report  
[www.tracyskids.org](http://www.tracyskids.org)

## Message from Matt Gerson, Founder and President of *Tracy's Kids*

25 years?!?! It is amazing that it is 25 years since I met Tracy and started on this amazing journey to help young cancer patients and their families cope with the emotional stress and trauma of the disease and its treatment. Our Masters-trained therapists have worked with over 100,000 people -- empowering them to process their emotions, build emotional resilience and have some well-deserved.

Our mission has been to ensure that the children we serve are psychologically equipped to fight their illness as actively as possible – and prepared for the time when they are cancer free. Many of the patients we worked with over the years are now young adults who have careers and families of their own. It is incredibly rewarding to learn what they're up to. I recently bumped into the grandmother of a patient from decades ago and she raved about how her granddaughter says that Tracy and the art therapy program stimulated her interest in the arts. The 30-something young woman is now with a furniture design firm in New Orleans.

Tracy recently heard from one of her earliest patients at Lombardi who is now a teacher in the DC public schools. He wrote:

*"I never told you that you are the real reason why I wanted to work with kids. You were my first best friend when I got sick and you made me feel welcomed. I always talk to my students about my cancer treatments and it encourages them."*

Your contributions have been put to good use. Your encouragement kept us going. I know that we would not have reached this milestone or made a difference for as many families if not for the support of friends like you.

**-Matt Gerson, Founder and President**

## Our Mission

**Tracy's Kids** helps young cancer patients and their families cope with the emotional stress and trauma imposed by cancer and its treatment. We are dedicated to helping the children and families we serve to be emotionally prepared to fight cancer as actively as possible—and prepared for the time when they are cancer free.

### What is art therapy?

Art therapy is a mental health profession in which patients and Art Therapists use the creative process and the resulting artwork to explore feelings, reduce anxiety, and improve social skills and confidence. The **Tracy's Kids** team of Masters-trained and credentialed Art Therapists offer a wealth of art media and approaches to patients from toddlers to twenty-somethings.

### Processing medical trauma

Young people who endure long courses of treatment or sudden, life altering diagnoses often experience overwhelmingly scary events. Events too frightening to be remembered and understood are stored as non-verbal memories. Smells, sounds, visual images, and bodily sensations can trigger distress if they match the sensory memories of the traumatic event. Visual communication helps our patients identify troubling sensations and memories, put their feelings on paper, and reflect on their experiences in both art and words, gaining distance from scary events.



Young patients use their artwork to teach others about the importance of donating blood (left); as a tool to help manage anxiety (below); and as a way to preserve self-identity and sense of agency during treatment (right).



*In 2023, the Tracy's Kids programs provided 8,702 hours of art therapy, over 12,756 art therapy contacts with patients and family members, and 1,488 hours of consultation with treatment teams.*

## Tracy's Kids' Work

In 2023 *Tracy's Kids* operated at seven treatment centers across the country--three in the Washington, DC Metropolitan area, one in New York City, one in Baltimore, and one in San Antonio, Texas. All of our services are offered at no cost to the patients and families we serve. Our patient-centered, open studio approach for inpatients and outpatients allows us to provide support during all phases of cancer treatment.

*Tracy's Kids* began at the Lombardi Cancer Center of Georgetown University Hospital in 1991 and has grown from one art therapist at one hospital to ten art therapists at seven locations in five states. They are integrated members of the medical teams and work directly with physicians, nurses and medical professionals to help address the multi-faceted needs of each patient.

*Tracy's Kids* provides opportunities for relaxation, confidence-building, and self-expression. Using art to identify fears and feelings, whether conscious or unconscious, the *Tracy's Kids* program allows young patients and their siblings and parents to gain some control over the difficult experiences they are going through.

Year after year, parents tell us that their children come to our clinics eagerly anticipating the art projects they will do. Shifting the focus from medicine and discomfort to creativity makes treatment days less stressful. Art therapy can't replace the soccer games, sleepovers and normalcy that are lost during cancer treatment, but through art kids are able to experience themselves not "just" as a patient or sick kid, but as creators, in charge of their art and engaged in meaningful work. We help them find what they are able to do and what they enjoy, cultivating resilience and hope that the illness will not be forever. And in the process they can trust our trained art therapists with whatever is on their minds.



In 2023, *Tracy's Kids* continued with Phase 2 of our PCATS art therapy research study, with participants enrolled at Children's National Hospital and New York Presbyterian locations. Preliminary findings suggest that our work has a strongly measurable positive effect on patient mood, sense of agency, and diminishing sense of isolation. The study is a collaboration between our hospital partners, Drexel University, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

## ***Tracy's Kids and Families***

***Tracy's Kids*** focuses on the children undergoing cancer treatment, but the impact of this disruptive and scary chapter of their lives extends well beyond the patient. We know the entire family suffers when a child has cancer, and we encourage siblings, patients and other family members to work with our art therapists whenever they can.



Peyton and a young patient show us the silly side of art therapy!



A family of "Swifties" who participate in the Tracy's Kids program at the Walter and Herman Samuelson Children's Hospital at Sinai Hospital in Baltimore got some excellent swag from the Era's Tour, courtesy of a Tracy's Kids supporter.

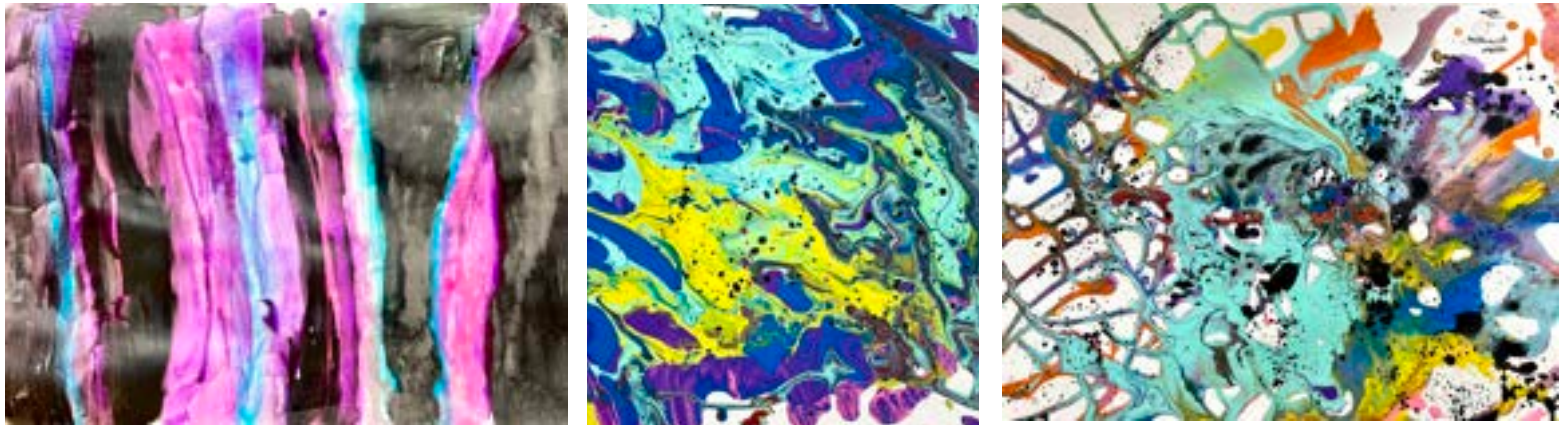
## **2023 Grants to Provide Art Therapy**

*In 2023, Tracy's Kids awarded \$546,921 in grants to our seven art therapy program sites.*

In 2023, *Tracy's Kids* granted Children's National Hospital **\$188,074** for their art therapy program.

**Children's National** has the Washington DC area's largest pediatric oncology program, with a 30-bed inpatient unit that is often filled to capacity, in addition to a twelve-bed Bone Marrow Transplant unit.

**Beth Tutt, Lauren Schlenger** and **Alby Gyimah-Boadi** make up the Tracy's Kids team at Children's National Hospital. 2023 brought reinstatement of the Summer Scribbling Siblings Program and restored access to the art room for both inpatients and outpatients, as pandemic restrictions lifted.



Tonya is an 11-year old patient with a diagnosis of sickle cell disease, who came to Children's for a bone marrow transplant. She uses art-making to express her feelings and help her regulate her emotions, which were understandably intense and changeable as she faced the challenges of a bone marrow transplant. When she was not feeling well, Tonya would decline other forms of supportive care, but invite the art therapist to choose a material or process for her. On one low-energy day, syringe painting became an energizing process. She shifted her focus and created three paintings. Later she offered the following reflection: "I was feeling bad and started with dark colors, then in the middle I felt happy and started to brighten up my work with bright colors. Art therapy helps me forget I'm in pain for a few minutes."

***"The art therapy that Tracy's Kids provides patients in our Cancer and Blood Disorders Center is essential to healing. It is often just as important as the medicines and therapies we provide." -- Jeffrey Dome, MD***

**Tracy's Kids** at **Children's National Hospital** logged 2,930 hours of art therapy, 4,239 patient contacts, and 430 hours of consultation with treatment teams in 2023.

In 2023 *Tracy's Kids* granted PSV's Center for Cancer and Blood Disorders and Inova Children's Hospital \$75,000 for their art therapy program.

The *Tracy's Kids* program at PSV provides a safe, therapeutic, and fun space for patients of all ages and their family members to process the emotional stress and anxieties that often go hand-in-hand with the diagnosis of a chronic medical illness.

**Catherine Rubin** led the *Tracy's Kids* Program at the 22-bed **L.J. Murphy Children's Hospital in Fairfax**, helping inpatients process medical challenges, relax, and gather with small groups of other patients who work creatively together.



**Halle wants to go to college to study art and animation. She worked in art therapy throughout treatment to create artwork that would be featured in an end of treatment art show. The painting she is holding was started the day she came up from the Operating Room after a major surgery.**

**Jess Girard** worked full-time at the outpatient Infusion Center. **PSV's Center for Cancer and Blood Disorders** is housed in the Inova Schar Cancer Institute. Jess worked with patients individually in exam rooms, at their infusion chairs, and in the art area, adapting to the needs of the patients present each day. With caring for the whole family a priority for *Tracy's Kids*, Jess has also been able to create a protocol for siblings to tour the clinic and spend some time with her in the art room, even though they cannot routinely accompany patients for their infusions. **Inova Children's Hospital** art therapist Catherine Rubin left her position in May, 2023.

During 2023, the *Tracy's Kids* program at **PSV** provided 1,289 hours of art therapy, 2,844 patient contacts, and 142 hours of consultation with medical teams. At **Inova Children's Hospital**, we provided 415 hours of art therapy, 375 patient contacts, and 27 hours of consultation with medical teams.

In 2023, *Tracy's Kids* granted Methodist Children's Hospital in San Antonio \$32,051 for their art therapy program,

The *Tracy's Kids* program at Methodist Children's Hospital in San Antonio, TX serves a very large and growing population at a regional medical center. Art Therapist **Courtney Martin**, who is in her ninth year at Methodist, is well-integrated into the medical and psychosocial support teams.

Last year the Hematology-Oncology and Bone Marrow Transplant programs at Methodist continued to grow at an exponential rate. Pandemic restrictions still shuttered common spaces on both inpatient and outpatient units during 2023. Courtney works hard to meet the needs of a 23-bed Bone Marrow Transplant Unit, a 16-bed inpatient unit and a burgeoning outpatient clinic.



In 2023 *Tracy's Kids* at **Methodist Children's Hospital** provided 595 hours of art therapy sessions, 909 patient contacts, and 301 hours of consultation with treatment teams.



In 2023, *Tracy's Kids* granted New York Presbyterian Hospital \$ 77,000 for their art therapy program.

**Sarah Fine** is the *Tracy's Kids* art therapist at the **New York Presbyterian Phyllis and David Komansky Children's Hospital**. She works closely with clinical teams to provide individualized art therapy sessions to inpatients in the General Pediatric Unit and Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, outpatients in the Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Clinic, and their families.

Sarah initiates art therapy at the time of diagnosis. Developing a therapeutic alliance at the beginning of treatment provides a strong foundation for supporting kids and families through all the challenges they will face. When they go home after the initial treatment in the hospital, patients return for outpatient care. On their first day at clinic, Sarah orients them to the open studio space and invites them to create while receiving chemo. The ever-changing art display in the clinic reflects the feelings and experiences of artists of all ages, and allows patients to feel a sense of belonging.



Two young patients at NYP made mailboxes and exchanged drawings and letters of encouragement with each other when they couldn't leave their rooms during an intensive phase of treatment.

In 2023, *Tracy's Kids* at New York Presbyterian Hospital provided 900 hours of art therapy, 2,400 patient contacts, and 80 hours of consultation to treatment teams.

In 2023, *Tracy's Kids* granted the Herman and Walter Samuelson Children's Hospital at Sinai in Baltimore \$65,475 for their art therapy program.

**Danielle Eichner** and **Peyton Kirkendall** are the Tracy's Kids Art Therapists at Sinai. Peyton is the full-time, in-person anchor for the program, working with patients in the hospital and the outpatient clinic.

Danielle works part-time, as the art therapist for the **Late Effects/Survivorship** program that opened in 2022. Both Danielle and Peyton work with a number of off-treatment patients in individual sessions, either in-person or via Zoom. They both facilitate ad hoc special interest groups, such as a grief group for siblings and parent/caregiver support.



A young patient made this "Just Keep Swimming" artwork at the end of treatment, as a way of thanking those who had helped her along the way.

During 2023, the *Tracy's Kids* program at Sinai provided 1,265 hours of art therapy, 1,660 patient contacts, and 307 hours of medical team consultation.

In 2023, **Tracy's Kids** granted The Henry M. Jackson Foundation \$38,434 for their art therapy program.

In the summer of 2022, Sara Cantrell took the reins of the **Tracy's Kids** program at Walter Reed Military Medical Center. The WRMMC team's receptiveness and appreciation for Tracy's Kids supports a multi-faceted program that has become integrated into their practice in a very short time. In fact, their chief physician describes art therapy as "the standard of care" in pediatric oncology at WRMMC--meaning art therapy is fully integrated into their overall treatment model.



The **Tracy's Kids** program at Walter Reed hosted a patient art exhibit in the main hall of the hospital in September 2023, in recognition of Childhood Cancer Awareness Month.

Patients range in age from the youngest toddlers, to married, active-duty soldiers. The art therapy program takes great care to make sure that no matter what age our patients and their families feel welcome and know that art therapy is there to support them.

During 2023, the **Tracy's Kids** program at the **Henry M. Jackson Foundation** provided 1,308 hours of art therapy, 329 patient contacts, and 201 hours of medical team consultation.

## Community Support



*Nineteen DC area Lions Clubs International chapters hosted art supply drives for Tracy's Kids, delivering carloads of supplies to Children's National!*



The Washington Capitals invited artists from Tracy's Kids to make player portraits and Caps-themed art for a special fundraising auction as part of their "Hockey Fights Cancer" initiative--and the artists were their guests at the game!



*In their annual Derby Day fundraiser, the Knights of Columbus Arlington Council 2473, raised over \$20,000 for Tracy's Kids!*



In December, students at Thomas W. Pyle Middle School in Bethesda held an art supply drive for Tracy's Kids!



Despite a rogue May hailstorm, the Ladies of Fairfax Country Club held a benefit tournament in May, raising over \$4,000 for Tracy's Kids.



### Special Events in 2023



In October, Tracy's Kids held a 25th anniversary celebration. We honored Amy Klobuchar with our Courage Award. Senator Chris Van Hollen recognized Tracy's 31 years of service at Georgetown, and Senator Mark Warner presented our Community Service Award to the Arlington Knights of Columbus Council 2473, whose Derby Day events have raised over \$70,000 for Tracy's Kids.



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