

## ***The evolution of Bailey's Clubhouse***

### ***"Caring for children while parents get the cancer care they need"***

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

Cancer treatment by its very nature is an extremely stressful process. And additional complications arise when the patient has children - especially young children. Anecdotally, an observant spouse of a breast cancer patient saw this dilemma firsthand and for years, continued to revisit this issue in his own mind and in conversations with family and friends.

Bret Hosket of Columbus, Ohio was fortunate to have an extensive personal and professional support system during his wife's illness. This support network enabled him to accompany her to medical, chemotherapy, and radiation appointments while also knowing that they had consistent and reliable care for their three boys. However, it was while running down to the snack area during a chemotherapy treatment that he witnessed a scene that would circle back in his memory for years to come. He watched a young mother, clearly a cancer patient who had just undergone a treatment. She was visibly uncomfortable and struggling. The anguish and fatigue on her face were pronounced. Bret felt her pain as he watched her struggling to contain the toddler sitting on her lap. Not knowing exactly how he could help the unfortunate situation, he watched the oncology nurse trying to distract and entertain the little one, but her priority had to be delivering medical care to her patients.

Single parent households logically face immense strain when that one parent is ill; however, two-parent households have similar challenges when facing a cancer diagnosis in the household (Aamotsmo & Bugge, 2013). Both the sick and the healthy parent face a variety of obstacles, with the healthy parent often juggling work, caretaking, and parenting obligations,

while simultaneously dealing with their own emotions, frustrations, and grief as they witness their spouse suffering from cancer (Inhestern & Bergelt, 2018). This perfect storm of stressors further emphasizes the universal need for supportive services for families with a parent facing a cancer diagnosis (Aamotsmo & Bugge, 2013; Inhestern & Bergelt, 2018; Pritlove & Dias, 2022; Rashi et al., 2017).

### **BARRIER TO TREATMENT**

Persuasive evidence supports the significance of childcare as a hurdle to adherence to successful cancer treatment for patients who are parents (Cohen et al, 2017; Preston et al., 2021). An environmental scan of the top National Cancer Institute cancer treatment centers found childcare for cancer patients provided at only one of the top cancer centers in the United States and Canada (Levine et al., 2022; Preston et al., 2021). Upon closer examination, the identified center provided childcare exclusively for their own employees who are also cancer patients, therefore it is an employee benefit rather than a universal service available to all patients (BWH, 2023). Researchers conclude with strong statements regarding the importance of childcare resources for cancer patients going forward to improve the quality of life for families and simultaneously reduce stress created by childcare concerns (Levine et al., 2022).

Cancer patients consistently identify childcare issues as a significant barrier to completing treatment protocols successfully, impacting both the patient and the healthcare system (Li et al, 2023; Pritlove & Dias, 2022). Canadian studies of cancer patients provided supporting evidence through patient interviews, with over half of female patients indicating the need to reschedule or missing appointments directly due to childcare issues, impacting the patient treatment plan, patient mental health status, and the healthcare system (Li et al, 2023; Zhang et al, 2023).

An inspiring and innovative childcare center is found in Dallas, Texas associated with Parkland Hospital, and currently stands as the only facility of this kind in the United States. Annie's Place at Parkland is working to address the service gap for adult patients who are parents to young children. Started as a shared nanny system for a few oncology patients, Annie's Place has expanded to encompass structured childcare services for a wide range of parenting patients and includes the provision of meals, diapers, formula, and other amenities to the Dallas County hospital's economically diverse population. Annie's Place is a collaboration between the original non-profit organization Mommies in Need and the Parkland healthcare system and is supported by a wide range of corporate and private funding sources in the Dallas community (Annie's Place, 2023). Results from an academic study of the services provided at Annie's Place strongly support the fact that childcare is a barrier to successfully accessing healthcare for parents (Alvarez et al, 2020).

### **BAILEY'S CLUBHOUSE**

Bret Hosket continually circled back to memories of the struggling young sick mother with her toddler. He would mention his thoughts and frustration for that young mother whenever he recounted his own personal family journey with cancer. After Bret's wife passed away, he had a nagging desire to honor her life in a positive manner.

The concept of Bailey's Clubhouse evolved from personal experience combined with academic evidence and a driving passion to contribute back to families struggling with a parent facing cancer diagnosis and treatment. The mission and goal of Bailey's Clubhouse is "caring for children while parents get the cancer care they need". Bailey's Clubhouse are envisioned as safe, supportive, and fun childcare centers where parents who need to attend medical appointments associated with their cancer treatment can drop their children off prior to their

appointments and pick up their children seamlessly on completion of the medical appointment. The mascot for Bailey's Clubhouse, a friendly golden retriever, serves to promote a nurturing environment focused on carefree play and socializing, with special attention to the unique emotional challenges faced by children with a parent facing serious illness. Supervised by childcare specialists and incorporating paid and volunteer staff, the innovative center will utilize activities and curriculum specifically designed by child life specialists.

### **CANCER AND PARENTS**

Cancer, in its multiple forms and presentations, continues to rank as the second leading cause of death in the United States (CDC, 2021). Of particular concern in relationship to childcare is the number of young adults facing oncology treatment and appointments, with estimates by the National Cancer Institute placing 20% of cancer patients falling between the generally regarded parenting ages of 20 to 54 years old (Preston et al., 2021). Similar statistics place approximately one out of every five individuals diagnosed with cancer as parents to young children (Li et al., 2023). This equivalates to 2.85 million American children coping with a parent undergoing cancer treatment (Levine et al., 2022).

Access to reliable childcare is highlighted in the literature as a recognized barrier to medical services for oncology patients (Preston et al., 2021; Pritlove & Dias, 2022; Rashi et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2023) and as a social determinant of health (Birchfield, 2020). Families of cancer patients face uncertainty regarding their loved one's health status and battle a day-to-day struggle to continue to lead a relatively normal household lifestyle while having a spouse or parental figure facing a potentially life-threatening illness (Ellis et al., 2017; Helseth & Uffsaet, 2005; Li et al., 2023).

**GOING FORWARD**

Under the guidance of a founding Board of Trustees pulled from a variety of professions, Bailey's Clubhouse has a strategic plan to collaborate with healthcare systems and enlist private and corporate partnerships to formulate sustainable financial support. The professionally based and deliberate business plan and strategic collaboration efforts will enable both the formation and long-term maintenance of a welcoming childcare center for families facing cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Partnership with healthcare organizations is a vital component of the project design, with healthcare partners providing and underwriting the physical facility for the childcare center and all landlord-associated necessities such as janitorial services, security, and general maintenance of the physical location. Collaboration between a community-based organization such as Bailey's Clubhouse and healthcare providers has been shown to address the need to no-cost childcare support for patients who are parents (Alvarez et al, 2020). The partnership between Bailey's Clubhouse and healthcare providers is a win-win for all parties, as the potential to greatly reduce missed and rescheduled medical appointments and procedures and the attraction to gain additional market share provides not only altruistic, but also serve as financial motivation for healthcare organizations to partner with Bailey's Clubhouse. The nonprofit organization Bailey's Clubhouse will direct, coordinate, supervise and financially support the staffing and programming requirements of the childcare center. Ideally, the flagship Bailey's Clubhouse will provide a framework that can be replicated in collaboration with other medical providers. Bailey's Clubhouse will serve to address, one childcare center at a time, the identified gap in healthcare delivery by enabling patients and their families to navigate and participate in their cancer treatment plans more successfully.

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