



THE CHILDREN'S HOME OF PITTSBURGH & LEMIEUX FAMILY CENTER

FALL NEWSLETTER 2019

# A Home for Hannah

A celebration of adoption: Hannah and her family two years after placement!

AUGUST 2019

ADOPTION • CHILD'S WAY® • PEDIATRIC SPECIALTY HOSPITAL

## A Home for Hannah

**Mama Yao and Baba Chen.** That's what Jillian and Kelly call Hannah's biological parents from China. They chat over the phone about twice a month.

Hannah was born in the United States. She was diagnosed with several issues at birth, including Down syndrome. But her parents, then visiting the U.S. from mainland China, feared that they wouldn't be able to meet Hannah's medical needs back home.

They made a difficult decision: place Hannah for adoption in the U.S.

"The biological parents were a married couple intent on growing their family but knew they didn't have the resources to care for her back home," explains Erika Schmitt, Director of Adoption. After leaving the hospital, Hannah came under the care of The Children's Home & Lemieux Family Center, while her birthparents began to work with the Adoption program to find the perfect adoptive family for their daughter.

"My daughter, Hayden, is the reason we have Hannah in our life," says Jillian, Hannah's adoptive mom. Hayden has autism. When Hannah's birthparents selected Jillian's family, it was because they knew Jillian's family could care for a child with special needs. Today, Hannah receives physical and speech therapy once a week, as well as Milestones, a program that provides services for her development.

"In my faith, to sacrifice for another is the ultimate form of love," says Jillian, a fact that she has stressed to Hannah's birthparents; the two families make a point to check in with one another on occasion. "Hannah's birthparents see us as part of their family. We see them as part of ours. And that's important to us." Jillian even has photos of their wedding and Hannah's biological grandparents. One day, she hopes to share them with Hannah. But for now, the two-year-old is focused on walking. She's a full-time explorer who occasionally chases the cats.

Adoption, like love, crosses cultural, religious, and geographic boundaries. Children of adoption often mean the world to more than one family, adoptive and birth. In Hannah's case, her Chinese name, Yang Pu, symbolizes just that: a precious, royal gem brought across the ocean.



*Happy, happy, happy: Hannah with mom (Jillian) after a Cheerio snack.*

# A New Playground for everyone.



*Delilah and family smile for a photo at the playground grand opening.*

A wheelchair swing sits under a big oak tree. Down the path further you'll see a ramp, leading to a double-wide bridge. Turn left and you're in the sensory tunnel, filled with light and color. And all around you'll hear music — **giant xylophones, chimes and drums,**

**accessible to every budding musician.**

This is the setting of The Children's Home & Lemieux Family Center's newest addition, an inclusive playground located right in the facility's backyard. Open to the

public, The Children's Home ushered the playground in this past summer with a grand opening. Presided by none other than former Steeler's quarterback, Josh Dobbs, the event was co-chaired by Ranny Ferguson and Laura Penrod Kronk.

Childhood memories can be hazy, but you might be surprised how well you recall playground experiences. That's because playgrounds are more than a place of play. They challenge children to explore, make new friends, and learn in different ways. But not all playgrounds are created equal. Without accessibility features like ADA swings or ramps, joining in on the fun for children with disabilities is sometimes not possible.

Thanks to PNC, who hosted the event that raised the needed funds for the playground, The Children's Home was able to design a more inclusive setting to accommodate children with disabilities. Smooth, level rubber surfacing cushions falls to prevent injury and makes getting around easier for children in powerchairs. Ground-level features such as musical instruments, a wheelchair swing, and ramps also enable greater participation for children of all abilities and stages.

While greater attention must be paid to create a more equitable, inclusive community for children who move and interact with the world differently than their typical peers, The Children's Home is excited to take a step in the right direction, bringing this playground to the neighborhood for all children and families.



*Jackson and dad explore the new sensory tunnel at The Children's Home.*

# Cutting the Ribbon!



Josh Dobbs is joined by Ranny Ferguson (Grand Opening Co-Chair), Pam Keen (CEO), Laura Ritz (PNC Leadership), and Laura Penrod Kronk (Grand Opening Co-Chair) to cut the ribbon!

## A Note from Pam

We welcome this fall season with some exciting additions to The Children's Home! As you've seen, we placed the finishing touches on our new, inclusive playground. We're thrilled to have this space that encourages children of all abilities and skills to participate. A big THANK YOU to our friends at PNC for hosting the event that raised the funds to make our new playground possible.

This fall has also brought new faces to The Children's Home that I'm excited to introduce you to: Dr. Beverly Brown and Dr. Katharine Yoder will be our first onsite physicians at the Pediatric Specialty Hospital. As we've grown to care for medically fragile children of greater complexity and acuity than ever before, Dr. Brown and Dr. Yoder will help us meet the demand with high-quality care for all children and families that need us.

Adoption is also making new strides for children and families. The program placed four babies through

infant adoption and seven children with finalized adoptions from foster care. In addition, the program provided 75 birthparents with professional counseling and support. For children in foster care, Adoption completed 60 child preparation units of service to help prepare them for permanent living situations.

Finally, Child's Way is running at full steam, providing early childhood development and care to children and youth with over 75 different diagnoses! We had one of our busiest summers yet, with medically fragile youth and teens attending Child's Way with school out for the season. In total, Child's Way had an average of 52 children enrolled this summer season.

Thank you to all of our donors, volunteers, staff and families who make The Children's Home a special place. Enjoy the fall and cooler weather ahead!

*Pamela R. Keen*

Pamela R. Keen  
Chief Executive Officer

### CARE BY THE NUMBERS: A YEAR IN REVIEW



**>400** individuals were served through the Adoption program.



**68** medically fragile children received early childhood development and nursing care in Child's Way®.



**341** children were admitted to the Pediatric Specialty Hospital last year, with free medical education for their families to help prepare them for home.

# Making Room for kids

For some kids (and adults), an Xbox is more than just a fun gaming system; it brings joy and entertainment when it's needed most. That's the case for Dawn and her kids, who have spent months in the hospital and now reside at The Children's Home & Lemieux Family Center. Dawn's baby, Golden, was born premature. He still needs time to grow and heal.

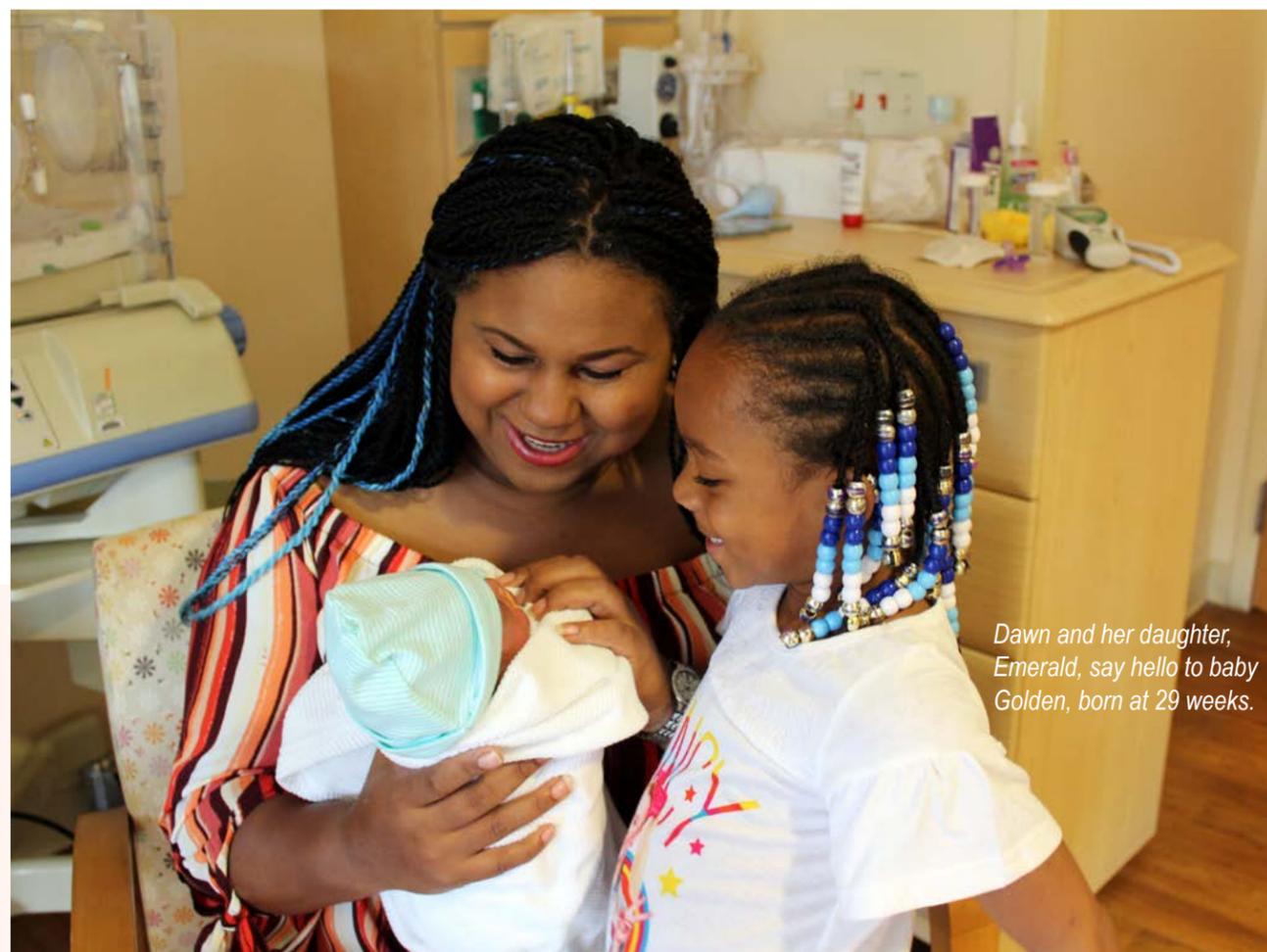
"Mommy, look how many points I got!" Emerald, Dawn's daughter, says. She's playing "Paw Patrol" on a brand-new Xbox One, donated courtesy of Make Room for Kids (MR4K), an extension of the Mario Lemieux Foundation's Austin's Playroom

initiative. Make Room for Kids is one of many ways the Mario Lemieux Foundation works with The Children's Home and other hospitals. Created ten years ago by Pittsburgh-based blogger, Virginia Montanez, MR4K brings gaming to sick kids in hospitals. Now operating as part of the Mario Lemieux Foundation, with support from Pittsburgh's local Microsoft office, MR4K has served hundreds of children and families throughout Pittsburgh with over 400 Xbox consoles.

Emerald learns how to play the game almost instantly. Dawn praises and challenges her further: "Look how smart you are! Tell me the number of



Game on! Emerald tries out the new Xbox courtesy of Make Room for Kids.



Dawn and her daughter, Emerald, say hello to baby Golden, born at 29 weeks.

points it says on the screen. What are those numbers?"

Like many features of the Pediatric Specialty Hospital, the Xbox makes things feel a bit more like home. And that fits a larger model, designed just for families like Dawns': "At The Children's Home, I can be here with my baby whenever I want. I can have my other kids here, making sure they're eating properly, because there's a kitchen to cook and different things to entertain them. With three other children at home, I've been trying to run my own business while my husband works crazy hours for the Port Authority. Things have definitely gotten easier since coming to The Children's Home," Dawn says.

With private rooms, kitchens, amenities, and more in the Lemieux Family Center, the Pediatric Specialty

Hospital has a homelike feel. This design helps families feel comfortable and supported, better able to learn their child's care during their stay, which ensures a safe transition from hospital to home.

"I have so much flexibility at The Children's Home. It is important that I can be with my baby. There's no noisy alarms and beeping. I'm able to hold him whenever I want. And, The Children's Home helps to accommodate my other kids," Dawn says.

While Dawn and her family will have to wait a bit longer before they can return home with baby Golden, it's the little things that make life easier, like playing a few games while mom nurses your new baby brother.



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