



BECAUSE OF YOU, A LIFETIME OF IMPACT

Sixteen years ago, as a newborn in the ICU at Children's Hospital of Michigan, Marisa underwent her first liver surgery. Born with a rare disease, biliary atresia, that blocked her bile ducts, her body was in septic shock brought on by bacteria that had gotten into her blood.

Doctors did not expect her to survive.

"She fought very hard," says her mom, Shannon. "She's a miracle. She really is."



Marisa received her liver transplant at the University of Michigan Mott Children's Hospital when she was 21 months old. Though the surgery saved her life, Marisa continued to battle many health challenges for several years, including three bouts of rejection.

From implanted abdominal shunts to improve bile management to hernia repairs, she's undergone more than a dozen surgeries since she was an infant. She takes anti-rejection medications every day, drugs that weaken her immune system and leave her susceptible to infections. She regularly undergoes bloodwork to ensure she's healthy. She will rely on medical interventions for the rest of her life.

For years, she felt alone with her illness—until she discovered our cost-free medically supported camp.

One of Marisa's favorite nurses, Vicki Shieck, told her mother about camp. Despite feeling nervous to let her daughter go the first time, Shannon was willing to give it a try because she trusted the camp's medical team—and because Marisa, then 8, convinced her mother she was ready to leave home for a week.

"Camp has changed my life, I wouldn't have been able to do this without you—thank you!"

- Marisa (pictured after her liver transplant, at 21 months)

At camp, Marisa isn't seen as a kid with a serious illness but as a quietly confident leader who loves fishing and swims in the pool without hiding her scars, because she sees other kids with them too. Her closest friends are other girls who've received organ transplants and also take immunosuppressant medications, some as many as 30 pills a day.

"If I have a biopsy or blood work coming up, I can talk to them and they actually get it—they understand," she says. "I have found people I will have a bond with for the rest of my life."

Marisa has been able to attend camp every summer since she was 8, all at no charge to her family, thanks to generous donors like you.

Over the years, she's gained a sense of belonging and independence. At Solstice Camp in June, she grew confident that she could pursue her dream to become a doctor. "I want to help kids realize that if I can do it, they can too."

Marisa's organ donor family has remained anonymous, despite attempts by Shannon to find and thank them for their life-saving decision. That makes this opportunity to thank you especially meaningful. Your gifts have supported Marisa's life-changing camp experiences.

"You have provided Marisa, and all of these kids, with experiences they likely would never have had," says her mom. "She just made her first phone call into clinic to tell them when she was getting her labs drawn. That's new! That's the independence camp has taught her. You cannot even measure how much your generosity means to us."



At Solstice Camp in June, age 16



First time at camp in 2012, age 8



VIEW FROM THE OBSERVATORY

Medical Director Dr. Becky Patrias provides care wherever care is needed. During Epilepsy Camp in July, she was on hand to assist a camper in the pool.

North Star Reach is proud to welcome Rebecca Patrias, M.D., as our new Medical Director. A graduate of the University of Michigan Medical School, Dr. Patrias has been a practicing physician at the University of Michigan Health System, where she also taught medical students and served as a staff physician, and at St. Joseph Mercy Hospitals in Ann Arbor and Chelsea. In 1989, she established a private practice in Chelsea, her hometown, for which readers of the Chelsea Guardian recently voted her “Best Physician.” She steps into her new role at North Star Reach with a key advantage: “Dr. Becky”—as she is known to our campers—has been an essential part of our medical team for many summers, volunteering hundreds of hours to care for campers.

You began your work at North Star Reach as a volunteer. What inspired you? For me, North Star Reach was the perfect combination of kids and people who want to be of service. The outdoors, the medicine and mentorship—it really just hit all my buttons. I knew it was home.

Here, we build and rebuild what the world needs. All of us who volunteer or work here

get the privilege of practicing building community, finding our best selves, and supporting each other. That doesn’t happen in a lot of venues. And it happens here.

You’ve worked at camp for four years. What have you seen camp do for kids?

I can’t tell you how many people I know whose experience of camp was their first contact with their genuine self. And it was transformative. I believe that’s happening for these kids.

Camp may be the first time that our campers get an opportunity to be who they are in an unrestrained way and just play and be kids—knowing that there is a safety net underneath them of a two-to-one ratio of kids to adults and a lot of health care providers who will keep them safe. To see campers come at the beginning of the week be hesitant and shy and by the end of the week be dancing and singing on stage and holding on to each other and walking down the hill together, is phenomenal!

Our campers see that there’s a whole lot of people with things to cope with and weave

into their lives as they do. I think that’s empowering too.

How is practicing medicine at North Star Reach a unique experience? Our medical team functions with love and respect for each other, for the counselors, for the kitchen staff, the maintenance crew, and the volunteers. It’s a team thing, truly! Parents know that it takes a team too. If I were a parent, what I’d really want to know is that my kid is going to be cared for by a group of exceptional nurses, a sub-specialist for what my kid has, a generalist in case my kid gets a sliver, and fun counselors!

As Medical Director, what’s the most important thing you want our donors to know? We cannot do this without generous, caring donors. Every little bit counts. One ice pack, you know? One heating pad! It’s a super-complicated endeavor to provide a medical camp for kids with serious health problems. The people who give financially, no matter how small, make it possible for our kids to have this experience, which I honestly believe is life-changing.



“IT’S A TEAM THING, TRULY!”

“The culture of respect, love and desire to simply be of service to others is created each time our medical volunteers form a team of health professionals at camp,” says North Star Reach Medical Director Dr. Becky Patrias. “We pinch hit for each other. We are attuned to each other. We deliver medical care infused with love. That makes a difference here.” Together with North Star Reach Health Center Director Lauren Cannistraro, RN, Dr. Patrias is responsible for recruiting leading medical professionals to staff our summer sessions. The photo here features the medical team from Cardiology Camp in July.



THE IMPACT OF CAMP

YOU ARE HELPING TO CHANGE LIVES, ONE CAMPER AT A TIME

Who better to share the incredible impact just a few days at camp makes on the life of a kid with a serious illness than our campers? Here are a few comments shared by our teen campers at the close of Solstice Camp in June, a testimony to their life-changing experiences, which our generous donors make possible.

“I’ve never been to camp before. I’m so grateful that in a couple days strangers could become my closest friends.”

“I don’t know what to say except thanks for the awesome time. I will definitely be back as a counselor.”

“I find my courage here.”

“I’ve learned how important it is to speak up, because if you don’t speak up, you won’t be heard.”

“Thanks for making me believe I could be somebody.”



Pictured left to right: Dick MacDonald, MD (Pediatric Cardiologist, Mott Children’s Hospital); Lee Benjamin, MD (Director of Pediatric ER, Emergency Physicians Medical Group); Amy Neumann, RN (Pediatric Critical Care & Congenital Heart, Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital); Lauren Cannistraro, RN (Health Center Director, North Star Reach); Moose; Courtney Strohacker, MD (Pediatric Cardiologist, Mott Children’s Hospital); Julie Teunis, RN (Pediatric Cardiology, Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital); Deb Moening, RN (Emergency Medicine, Emergency Physicians Medical Group); Chris Nethers, RN (St. Joseph Mercy Health System); Becky Patrias, MD (North Star Reach Medical Director); Sarah Skavnak, NP (Pediatric Cardiovascular Surgery, Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital); Elizabeth Johnson, RN (Pediatric Intensive Care, Advocate Children’s Hospital); Kim Zaleski, RN & Paramedic (Michigan Medicine & Livingston County EMS); Margaret Elyakin, RN (Pediatrics, Michigan Medicine)



AN UPDATE ON MARCIE & AVERY

Many supporters of North Star Reach learned about the special friendship between 10-year-old Marcie and Avery from our spring fundraising appeal. The girls met three years ago at North Star Reach’s Transplant Camp. They had a blast at camp this summer—as their parents told us, every year it gets better and better. “We are very thankful and grateful to the people that donate to this camp,” Avery’s dad recently wrote on Facebook. “It is making a life-changing difference. We have experienced it first hand.”

DONOR GENEROSITY INSPIRES CAMPER
DISCOVERIES ABOUT THE NATURAL WORLD

Gathered inside our striking new teepee, campers are enjoying a new home for our outdoor education program. Activities include hikes through the woods, expeditions to find curious creatures, like butterflies and caterpillars, as well as leaves from the old growth forest. After selecting a favorite leaf, campers make clay impressions. The accessible teepee was funded by a generous gift from the Martinus T. Spoor Memorial Fund, established in memory of Dr. Martin Spoor, a cardiac surgeon and Michigan Medicine faculty member who was killed in the Survival Flight plane crash in 2007. On behalf of all the campers enjoying the teepee this summer—and who will for generations to come—thank you to Dr. Spoor’s family for creating a magical place for kids to explore the wonder of the natural world.



From oak and maple to sycamore and sassafras, campers select their favorite leaf to press into clay. Once dry, the artifacts are memorable keepsakes for campers to take home.



SERIOUSFUN NEWS

You can help North Star Reach win a generous match from our friends at Abercrombie & Fitch Co. by **donating to our A&F Challenge team** (visit http://bit.ly/nsr_anfchallenge). You’re also invited to join us Friday, September 6, 2019, at the annual festival and fundraiser hosted at the A&F Home Office, outside Columbus, Ohio. Jam-packed with camp vibes, live music, fresh eats, family-friendly games and more, the event last year raised \$3.9 million, with all proceeds benefiting SeriousFun camps, including North Star Reach. We hope you’ll join us to celebrate this incredible SeriousFun Children’s Network partnership.



Upcoming Events

- Swim to the Moon**
Gregory, MI
Sunday, August 18
- Under the North Star**
Detroit Athletic Club, Detroit, MI
Friday, September 13
- Fall Family Fest**
North Star Reach Camp, Pinckney, MI
Sunday, October 20

Stay Connected With Us!

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