

celebrate **GIVING**

Summer 2026 | Issue 17



Celebrating **20 Years** **OF HEALING PATCH**

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: Early Intervention | UPMC Home Healthcare | Family Hospice



Dear friends,

“Every day may not be good... but there’s something good in every day.” — Alice Morse Earle

This simple quote resonates with me as I consider the stories shared in this issue of Celebrate Giving. Through

health challenges, anticipated loss, and grieving, we see the resilience and impact of lives steeped in gratitude.

It is our privilege to serve people of all ages in our communities and a great honor to partner with you to make a difference for the most vulnerable among us. I think about special needs families like the Steeles, who found their village in Early Intervention and are now honoring the life of their precious daughter, Auri. I consider Blessing and her family as they navigate her life-limiting diagnosis with grateful hearts and the support of the Family Hospice team.

I am struck by the appreciation of Bob Myers, who was given a second chance at life thanks to the intuitive actions of his UPMC Home Healthcare nurse and comradery with his aide. I am humbled by the incredible growth of the

Healing Patch Children’s Grief Program over the past 20 years, knowing that this program was brought to fruition by selfless leaders and volunteers, many of whom personally dealt with the pain of grief. Their commitment – and your support – ensures that local children and their families who have lost a special person have the opportunity to connect and heal with others.

In the midst of heartache and hardship, these people have found reasons to be thankful. There are many who are enduring difficult circumstances, and the genuine compassion of others can offer hope to keep going. That compassion may be in the form of care that we provide in the home or community or in the form of your financial gift that provides resources at just the right time.

Thank you for being part of our story. Thank you for being a reason that someone will see the good in each day.

Gratefully,
Jennifer Vennare
President, UPMC at Home

giving impact
Congratulations
to the 2026
MERCEDES
MOMENT
Winners

Congratulations to Martinsburg resident Stanley Metz, winner of the 2026 Mercedes Moment with ticket #928. As Home Nursing Agency Foundation’s signature fundraiser, Mercedes Moment raised more than \$80,000 this year. Stanley was given the choice of \$35,000 toward the Mercedes of his choice or a \$30,000 cash prize. Additionally, Katie Conlon of Roaring Spring won the \$1,000 cash bonus



drawing based on the daytime number of #939.

Mercedes Moment benefits those who have needs beyond normal circumstances or require additional resources not covered by insurance. This year, the Home Nursing Agency Foundation has awarded \$183,900 in grants to directly impact the lives of Central Pennsylvania residents who are served by UPMC Home Healthcare and Family Hospice.

The Home Nursing Agency Foundation supports patients and families in Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Centre, Huntingdon, Mifflin, Juniata, and Somerset counties. If you would like to be added to the mailing list for the 2027 Mercedes Moment, please call 1-855-GIVE-HNA.

UPMC HOME HEALTHCARE

Intervenes for Johnstown Resident

Bob Meyers of Johnstown spent more than six decades teaching people how to market their products and services, and his best customer service experience to date has been the life-saving and life-changing interactions with his UPMC Home Healthcare team members.

Grieving the losses of his oldest son to brain cancer and his beloved wife of 59 years to pancreatic cancer, Bob found himself alone last year with his own chronic health conditions to manage. After his wife passed away, he spent some time in an assisted living facility but longed to return to the property where he grew up and the home that he had helped his father build. He had another home health agency but asked his doctor to refer him to a new provider to better fit his needs.

“The next day, *Linette [Longsinger-Clark, Sr. Professional Staff Nurse II, HH/Hspc]*, top picture, from UPMC Home Healthcare came to my house and explained what UPMC does and how they do it,” Bob shares. “I didn’t realize that Linette would someday save my life! She also told me that *Heather [Fitzpatrick, Home Care Aide]*, bottom picture, would be coming to help me. The next day Heather arrived, and through her laugh and sense of humor, I could feel my depression going away.”

Linette provided care, monitored his health, and educated Bob, and Heather assisted him with daily living tasks. As they got to know Bob and enjoy his stories, they both formed strong connections to him.

Earlier this year, he placed an unusual call to Linette, spurring her to action.

“When he called my cell phone, I knew something was wrong. His mental status had changed. I bolted there right away and called 911.”

Linette and the emergency responders determined that Bob’s condition was



serious. While being transported to the hospital, he fell into a coma and spent four days on a vent as his body battled sepsis and hypoxic respiratory failure.

“After I came out of the coma, I was moved from ICU to a regular room. The doctor told me that Linette had saved my life,” Bob recounts. “After the hospital, I was sent to the Transitional Care Unit and then back home with UPMC Home Healthcare. I renamed Linette ‘life saver’ and Heather ‘depression buster’.”

Through his experience, Bob has gained immense respect for the team who comes to help him maintain his independence.

“Some people have a hard time letting others come into their home to care for them or get upset if the schedule changes, but I am just so thankful for them,” Bob shares. “These people are coming to help us and deserve respect! Because of them, I can still see and talk to my two sons, three daughters-in-law, and seven grandkids. Thank you!”

Paying forward his appreciation, Bob participated in the Heart of Gratitude program with a donation to recognize Linette and Heather. They received special pins, and Bob’s donation through the Home Nursing Agency Foundation will fund resources for emergency needs, monitoring devices, and other tools for future UPMC Home Healthcare patients.

To learn more about UPMC Home Healthcare, please visit upmchomehealthcare.com. To make a donation to support patients’ needs, visit HomeNursingAgency.com or call 1-855-GIVE-HNA.

Defying the Odds: MIFFLIN FAMILY HOSPICE TEAM Cares for Young Family

When Ben and Bethany Reapsome of Mifflin County did prenatal testing at 12 weeks to learn the gender of their baby, they didn't anticipate life-altering results. As they learned that they were having a baby girl, they also found out that the test was flagged as abnormal for a chance of trisomy, or the presence of an additional chromosome. Additional screenings revealed that their baby girl had Trisomy 18, and the couple was informed of options, including an abortion.

"My husband and I are Christians, and we said, 'Absolutely not!' We wanted to give our daughter a chance to live," Bethany shares. Praying for their daughter's health and finding the right team of doctors in Danville, the Reapsomes determined their birth plan would follow their daughter's lead.

"If she came out fighting, we would fight for her," Bethany said. After seven hours of labor, their daughter was born on February 8, 2023 into a quiet room. As Ben cut the umbilical cord, the baby reached for his hand, affirming their decision to support her opportunity to live. She was quickly moved to the NICU where she spent three weeks on oxygen and a feeding tube. In that time, Ben and Bethany settled on the name for their precious girl: Blessing Eliana, meaning "gift from God" and "My God has answered."

"Because of the statistics, we came home and thought she didn't have long," Bethany recalls. At two months old, Blessing went through a terrifying medical emergency as she stopped breathing and went limp; suffering what was later determined to be a seizure. While she was hospitalized for further testing, the Reapsomes faced a roller coaster of emotions and critical questions about the future.

"We had a serious conversation with the doctors. They asked, 'What do you want her life to be?' We wanted to spend as much time with her as possible, make the most of our time, and give her as much happiness as we can. Once we realized this, we started hospice care."

Upon her return home, Blessing was admitted to Family Hospice and improved despite the odds. The Family Hospice team monitored her on a regular basis, coordinated medication deliveries to their home, and provided emotional support.



"The first year and a half was the hardest," Bethany shares. "She wasn't a typical baby, and it was hard to tell what was wrong and how to comfort her. It was good to have someone checking her."

In July 2024, the Reapsomes welcomed their son Bennett to the family and were grateful to the Family Hospice team for supporting Ben's parents as they cared for Blessing. Later that year, Blessing underwent heart surgery at Penn State Hershey to repair a hole in her heart and narrowing of a valve that impacted blood flow.

"At the time of surgery, we discharged Blessing from hospice and did a lot of work to make sure they had everything they needed," shares Family Hospice Social Worker Kate Campbell-Tubbs. She was returned home just a week later and was readmitted back to hospice for six months, when she was discharged because she was doing so well.

After enduring additional seizures last spring and summer, Blessing was flown to Danville and found to be in kidney failure. She was prescribed regular injections, and Bethany asked that she be re-admitted to hospice. With her condition stabilized, the family makes the most of every moment together. As a Make-A-Wish recipient, Blessing and her family traveled to Disney World for her third birthday with Kate coordinating a travel contract for hospice coverage while they were in Florida.



"The Family Hospice team has been there for us when we're home and when we're not," Bethany shares. "The nurses are so often the face of hospice, but the monthly check-ins from Kate have been so helpful."

Hospice social workers play an integral role in connecting families to the right resources for financial and community support. This is especially impactful for cancer patients.

"I work closely with others in the inter-disciplinary team," Kate explains. "I'm blessed with a good team, and they know when to pull me in to provide additional support for patients and families. Part of my role is having tough conversations about things that need to be addressed."

Kate's check-ins with the Reapsomes provide a stabilizing touchpoint for Bethany and the reassurance that more help is available if needed.

"The team is always checking to make sure that we have what we need – meds or other supplies," Bethany shares. "Blessing is happy and doing well. She wouldn't be here without her doctors and the hospice team."

To learn more about Family Hospice, visit upmc.com/familyhospice. To make a donation to Family Hospice, visit tiny.cc/FHmemorial or call 1-855-GIVE-HNA.





EARLY INTERVENTION

BECOMES THE VILLAGE FOR SPECIAL NEEDS FAMILY

After Aurelia “Auri” Steele was born in September 2023 with Marfan syndrome, her parents Mark and Audrey recognized that they needed support as she grew and developed. The family soon began receiving Early Intervention services that became a critical support system. That support system changed significantly but is still present after Auri passed away unexpectedly on May 13, 2026.

“I have learned how to be a special needs parent,” Audrey shares. “There is no manual for that. We wanted to be home and keep Auri at home as much as we could, and they helped us to learn what we needed to do to make that happen. Everyone talks about their village. We have our village in Early Intervention. We had a journey with Auri because of them. Without them, we may have lost Auri sooner.”

Early on, Mark and Audrey embraced the presence of the Early Intervention team as they leaned into the way their parenting journey looked different than most.

EI Team Manager Diane Ringler, who was also Auri’s Speech Language Pathologist, echoes this vital role of the EI team: “We may serve as a support system for families who are navigating a whole new world of learning about a new diagnosis and navigating the medical world for their child. Connecting families to resources and just being a listening ear about their hopes and fears related to their child’s challenges is a way that we strengthen relationships with our EI families.”

Auri’s diagnosis of Marfan syndrome was a genetic condition affecting her connective tissue, including her heart and skeletal system. With severe scoliosis, feeding challenges, and some other issues, Auri benefited from physical, occupational, and speech therapy visits through Home Nursing Agency Early Intervention and special instruction and social work assistance from another EI agency. Surrounded by a supportive team, Mark and Audrey focused on helping Auri to thrive as much as possible.

“Our goal with families is to build their capacity and confidence as parents to be able to facilitate their child’s learning and development,” Diane explains. “We use a coaching model since parents know their child best and are their child’s best teacher.”

“Auri’s parents naturally built on her strengths and found new and creative ways to manage her physical challenges. We help provide the framework for what comes next in development. Our hope is always that the family will take that knowledge, along with their expertise in their child’s interests and abilities, to find ways to engage their child and help them to progress in their developmental skills.”

With Diane’s guidance, Mark and Audrey taught Auri to use sign language and assistive devices to communicate. Your support of the Home Nursing Agency Foundation provided an iPad for Auri to try a special communication software program. When she responded positively, the Steeles were able to purchase a dedicated device authorized by insurance. By tapping symbols, Auri conveyed her needs to her parents and heard different words as she built her own voice and vocabulary.

As they observed and responded to Auri’s wants and needs, Mark and Audrey introduced fun activities to develop the skills they worked on in therapy. One of Auri’s favorite activities was giving them tattoos, which required communication and fine motor skills to use markers.



Grant funding from the Home Nursing Agency Foundation also provided feeding tools and a walker, affectionately dubbed “an old lady walker”, as traditional pediatric walkers did not support Auri’s tall, thin frame. Her needs were often multi-faceted and required a different approach from other children.

“We couldn’t go through the motions,” Mark points out. “It forced us to think through things differently. We have nieces and nephews, but none of them are like Auri. Early Intervention has become our support team. It makes us feel like we’re not alone.”

Navigating life without Auri’s physical presence, Mark and Audrey gratefully reflect on the joy Auri brought them and how she challenged and inspired them to help others.

“There is so much sadness, but there is so much love,” Mark says. “Now our job is to honor Auri and to help other families. We have built community through resources, and you find people who become your family.”

The Steeles plan to establish a foundation in Auri’s honor to support families impacted by Marfan Syndrome. In the meantime, you can honor Auri’s life by donating to the Johns Hopkins Department of Genetic Medicine (<https://secure.jhu.edu/form/igm>, please designate “Marfan Syndrome Research”) or The Marfan Foundation (<https://give.marfan.org/aurisheart>).

To learn more about Early Intervention or make a donation to support families with special needs, please visit HomeNursingAgency.com.





giving hope

HEALING PATCH

Marks *20 years*
of Supporting Grieving Children & Families

"They all come from different walks of life and would never have been in the same circle. This event of death has brought them together and bonded them in a way nothing else could have..."

They see that they aren't alone."

-Trez Knob, Healing Patch Volunteer

The Healing Patch Children's Grief Program first opened its doors in 2006 as an outreach of Home Nursing Agency to serve children and families who have suffered the loss of a loved one. Twenty years later, this program continues to fulfill the vision of the late Altoona philanthropist Shirley Pechter and many others whose goal was to offer a "soft place to fall" for children and families in our region.

As Shirley previously shared:

I have witnessed firsthand how a loss touches every avenue of a child's life.

My ten-year-old-daughter, Melissa, died after being diagnosed with a brain tumor. My children were devastated - all in different ways. My husband, Fred, and I were distraught. We had no place to go for help.

Whether it's a sibling, parent, or grandparent, when a death of a loved one touches the life of a child, it's so vital to help them at that very moment. It lessens their burden, so they'll be able to cope - now, and later in life.

Today, my three adult children, and even I, are all well-adjusted. As you know, not every child - and family - will be as lucky.

There is no escaping grief.

So, it's our mission to ensure those grieving will have someone to console them and for someone like me to tell them, "You will - smile again."

"I was on the original committee with Shirley," shares Blair County resident Marilyn "Mickey" Port, who also became one of the program's first volunteers. "It spoke to me. With my own family's experiences with grief, it was like if you didn't talk about it, it was fine. There was no grieving. Shirley's family did it differently. The idea of being able to express grief really connected with me."

Trez Knob of Blair County was also one of the original volunteers, led to help after her personal experiences with grief. As a teenager, she lost her brother, and later endured the deaths of her mom and sister-in-law, who left behind a two-year-old child. "After my brother died, my dad couldn't talk about it, and my parents stayed in their room during the wake. When I heard about the Healing Patch being formed, I wanted to be part of it. The program was to bring the family together and communicate together. That would have made such a difference for my family."

A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

As Mickey and Trez have served over the past two decades, they have seen how the peer support program has been integral for kids, families, and volunteers.

"The program is outstanding," Mickey declares. "You can see the progress that the kids make. They start coming unsure of why they are there to opening up and sharing with others. It is incredible to see the acceptance the kids have of one another. It's transforming - for the kids and the volunteers."

SINCE 2006



560 students have gone
through Patch Club in-school
groups at schools in Bedford,
Blair, or Cambria counties



Healing Patch sewing
volunteers have sewn **1,012**
memory bears/pillows for
children and adolescents



2,354 children and
adults have participated
in family group sessions at
the Healing Patch center

1 in 11

children in Pennsylvania will experience
the death of a parent or sibling by age 18.
This number more than doubles by age 25.

Research shows that bereaved children are at an increased risk of disrupted development. Unaddressed childhood grief and trauma can lead to short- and long-term difficulties including decreased academic performance, mental health issues, and early mortality.



Trez shares, “Watching the difference in the families is amazing. Seeing them come and grieve together as a family and then move forward is the greatest gift. I’ve seen life-changing transformation for adults and kids. They come in completely broken, and they walk out happy and finally moving forward. Those families connect to each other and come out stronger.”

Family group sessions at the center start with gathering for a meal and games and then lead to an opening circle, where all attendees join hands to center their thoughts on the common ground that everyone is present because they have lost someone they love. From there, participants break out into age-specific groups for littles, middles, tweens, teens, young adults, and caregivers.

Led by compassionate and trained volunteers like Mickey and Trez, these groups offer crafts, games, or other activities to open the door for conversations about death, grieving, memories, and hope. Group nights end with a closing circle for participants to share special moments from the night. Groups are offered twice monthly throughout the school year with rolling admission for families to join at any time.

While Mickey prefers to volunteer in the middles or tweens rooms with the most active and vocal participants, Trez acts as a floater to fill in wherever needed from the littles to adults.

“I’ve learned something different from each group,” Trez says. “When I’m with the adults, I can tell them what the kids see and say. I can reinforce the need for communication. When I’m with the kids, I can give the adult perspective and sometimes share that to get conversations started. As volunteers, our goal isn’t to do all the talking; it’s to get them talking.”

SHARED COMPASSION

Volunteer facilitators choose and plan the activities for their groups. Some are more light-hearted to spur discussion, and others, like the “Magic Carpet Ride” are designed for deeper connection – both to their individual grief and to one another. In the Magic Carpet Ride, participants are invited to sit on a blanket or pillow, close their eyes, and visit any time or place they want. Some choose to meet their person who died and have a conversation or just be together.

“To witness a great Magic Carpet Ride is so meaningful,” Mickey recounts.

“One of the most poignant moments is when one child spontaneously comforts another who is sobbing. It molds the group together in a special way. We don’t take away their grief and sadness, but we help them explore that grief and sadness together.”

“Watching the kids fall in love with each other is a gift,” Trez says. “They all come from different walks of life and would never have been in the same circle. This event of death has brought them together and bonded them in a way nothing else could have. When one shares, they all start to share. They see that they aren’t alone.”

FIRM FOUNDATION TO MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS

While the Healing Patch is volunteer-based, Mickey and Trez both attribute the growth and impact of the program to the steady leadership through the years.

“Allison [Stockley] was a great ‘beginner’ in starting the program,” Mickey notes. “Her genuine kindness and spirit were a good motivator.” Lou Kensinger was the original volunteer coordinator, and Shannon Chille played a supportive role in earlier days. “Now, we have two outstanding



people. I can't say enough about *Melody* [Ray, Healing Patch Coordinator], and *Shalen* [Steinbugl, Volunteer Coordinator and Grief Specialist]. They do so much behind the scenes and have such positivity."

Empowered by committed volunteers, staff leaders have responded to the needs of the community by adding education for local students and school professionals, as well as Patch Club in-school groups. These allow children whose families could not attend a center to benefit from peer support with similar activities and conversation prompts that are used in the family group sessions.

"Grief is grief," Mickey says. "That hasn't changed. What has changed is how people have died. We have many more families impacted by drug overdose."

Recognizing this need, Melody sought resources for families to provide better support for this type of loss that is often stigmatized. When she didn't find a children's book to address the topic, she authored one in 2018 titled *Someone I Love Died from a Drug Overdose*.

FUNDING HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

All services are offered free of charge to children, families, and schools, but services come at a cost. When an early group of volunteers realized that program expenses may prevent the communal meal from being offered at group nights, they formed Patched Together: A Day of Music to Benefit the Healing Patch. Since its inception in 2011, Patched Together has raised more than \$190,000. The 13th Annual Patched Together event in November 2025 raised a record-breaking \$20,000.

Along with her volunteer work, Mickey and her husband, Neil, are committed donors to ensure that Healing Patch services are available for years to come.

"The Healing Patch is 'down home' and helps people," Mickey says. "We have always cared about kids. I like to send memorial donations when someone in our community passes away. It gives awareness and supports the program."

The impact of the Healing Patch is far-reaching for both participants and volunteers. As staff, volunteers, and donors have invested their time, talent, and treasure, Shirley's vision for restoring hope and joy to grieving families continues to change lives in Blair and Cambria counties and beyond.

"If you can help one person smile instead of cry, it means so much," Trez reflects. "I absolutely love the Healing Patch. The difference it's made is incredible."

GET HELP

- Learn more by following the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program Facebook page
- Call 1-800-445-6262
- Visit tiny.cc/healingpatch

- **Make a one-time or recurring gift** online at tiny.cc/healingpatchgiving or by calling 1-855-GIVE-HNA
- **Support an event** that benefits the Healing Patch:
 - Decades Club, September 26, 2026
 - Patched Together, November 21, 2026
 - Flashlight Egg Hunt, Spring 2027
- **Hold your own fundraiser** for the Healing Patch
- **Make a memorial donation** for someone who has died. The family is notified of your gift and its significance to support local grieving children. Donations can be directed to *Healing Patch, 20 Sheraton Drive, Altoona, PA 16601*

How to HELP the Healing Patch



RECOGNIZING OUR SUPPORTERS

The generosity of community partners – individuals, businesses, local governments, and organizations – helps to ensure that our mission of providing care and services for those in need will continue.

Every dollar matters. Every gift has a story. The following donors gave gifts of \$100 or more between April 1, 2025 – March 31, 2026. Donors of all amounts can be viewed online at: tiny.cc/HNAFoundationSupporters. Thank you to the donors who have helped to make a difference in the lives of our neighbors and our communities.

We apologize for any errors or omissions to this list. Every effort is made to assure that proper information is recorded. Please call the Home Nursing Agency Foundation at 1-855-GIVE-HNA to make us aware of any corrections or changes.

**Donor is deceased.*

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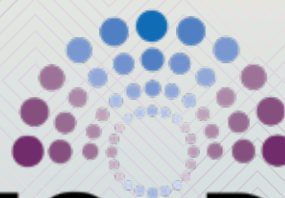
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