

Youth patients' recoveries are brightened with hospital overhaul



By Brock Weir

Chances are, when you think of hospitals, some of the first images that come to mind might be of a cold, sterile space that can best be described as 'beige or greige', not necessarily the most potent combination for inspiration and recovery.

But that is now a thing of the past for many patients at Southlake Regional Health Centre.

On Friday, Southlake unveiled a remarkable transformation in their Paediatric Operating Room clinic, their Medical Arts Building Day Surgery Clinic, and their Child and Adolescent Mental Health Unit from a dull and sterile greige to a rainbow of colour and fun thanks to the Smilezone Foundation.

'I think everybody in this space has at one time or another visited a hospital either for themselves or a family member,' said Susan Mullin, CEO of the Southlake Regional Health Centre Foundation at Friday's unveiling, joined by dozens of young patients and their families. 'That doesn't speak to the care that is provided.'

These sentiments were echoed by Gwenyth Anderson, a member of Southlake's Patient & Family Advisory Council.

'Let's face it: nobody wants to stay in a hospital, ever, but our young patients and families coming through to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health unit in the past have come into a sterile environment,' said Ms. Anderson. 'Although receiving care, variations of beige and 'greige' is really drab and uninviting. To have space that is bright, colourful, cheerful and comfortable is really vital; vital to the recovery of our most vulnerable mental health patients - children and youth.'

Working with clinical staff at Southlake to ensure the new colourful refurbishments were a good fit for their patients, the Smilezone team set out to make the vision a reality.

The Smilezone Foundation was founded in 2012 with a vision to transform spaces in hospitals and health care centres to improve the lives of children facing illnesses, disabilities, or physical and emotional obstacles. Since its inception, they have provided nearly 200 Smilezone spaces in communities ranging from Ottawa to Windsor.

Foundation co-founder Scott Bachly, himself born at what is now Southlake Regional Health Centre, was joined at the ribbon cutting by four generations of his family, including parents Marilyn and David.

'Already, over 125,000 children are visiting Smilezones annually, which is a huge number,' said Mr. Bachly. 'Smilezone does not change the way our children are treated, nor do we provide equipment or rehabilitation options, but what we are able to do is change the environment that has historically been a relatively blank space. We found that by adding colours, custom murals, gamification and technology, it is a more uplifting experience when our children attend for treatment. We also know that it is not just a child in need, it is the immediate family. It affects the siblings, parents, grandparents, the entire family unit is effective, and we also discovered early on that it really helps the staff.'

'The 10 Smilezone rooms that we're seeing here today are a result of my parents and related family members. My brother Dean passed away in the 1990s in his 30s from cancer. It was an exceptionally difficult time for all of us, but none harder than my parents Marilyn and David. My father David approached me last year and asked if we could build a legacy project in my brother's name on behalf of the Bachly family. My mum and dad approached all of our children and grandchildren to donate funds to make this happen and I am honoured to say they raised over \$100,000, which is an amazing feat. I can't thank you enough for making this a reality. It is because of your generosity, and my brother Dean's name, that the Bachly family have created this special place and this will be a

legacy for children in the Region for many years to come and that is a great honour for all of our family.?

This was a view shared by Annette Jones, Southlake's Vice President of Patient Experience, who said the transformation was ?remarkable?, turning the ?boring, institutional spaces? to rooms full of inspiration, creativity, and ?full of life.?

?Everything from the artwork to the entertainment to the furniture that has been brought into the areas are bright, cheerful, they are welcoming, not only for our patients and our families, but our staff, physicians and volunteers,? said Ms. Jones. ?When we make spaces more efficient for staff, and when we make space more joyful for our staff, that in turn has a tremendous impact by bringing joy to our patients and their families. Every day our staff and physicians go above and beyond to bring world class care to patients and families, and it is like these little things that the patients and families do appreciate cheerful smiles. It is the little things that count.?

Added Ms. Anderson: ?Thank you for giving our child and adolescent mental health program a chance to shine.?