Bringing Nicole Home

I’m coming home, I’m coming home
Tell the world I’m coming home
Let the rain wash away all the pain of yesterday...
I’m coming home.

So say the words of a song that is featured in a video made by 16-year-old Nicole, as she neared completion of a two-and-a-half month inpatient admission at Blythedale Children’s Hospital.

Certainly, for anyone who witnessed Nicole’s fragile condition upon admission last October, being discharged home anytime in the foreseeable future seemed highly unlikely, if not impossible altogether.

That is, however, until you get to know Nicole...
Dear Friends,

We at Blythedale Children’s Hospital are inspired by our patients every single day. Their strength and courage in the face of adversity drives us to make Blythedale the very best pediatric specialty hospital in the nation. Nicole, featured in our cover story, touched many lives during her inpatient admission to Blythedale. Her story is a perfect example of the vital importance of teamwork in recovery. Doctors, nurses, therapists, nutritionists, social workers, teachers, all working side-by-side with her dedicated family - initially to get Nicole moving, and ultimately to try and keep up with her. Nicole’s incomparable work ethic, combined with her committed clinical team, and deeply supportive friends and community, all played a role in bringing Nicole home. We look forward to sharing her future achievements, which will undoubtedly be significant.

In addition to the inspiration we derive from our patients, this issue of Inspired highlights the work of several of our generous supporters. Organizations such as The Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, and Special Kids of New York help us to provide a comprehensive level of care that is a hallmark of Blythedale.

As we begin a second year in our beautiful new inpatient building, we are busy renovating space for our expanded Day Hospital and Early Childhood Center, slated to open later this year. Surrounded by inspiration, we look forward to continuing to share our message of hope with you.

Sincerely,

Larry Levine
President and CEO

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**Bringing Nicole Home**
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Nicole, an honors student and tri-varsity athlete at Greenwich High School, had just started her junior year when she received a diagnosis of leukemia. Her mother, Michele, says the tears her daughter shed in the doctor’s office would be the last ones she would cry over her diagnosis. “I had that attitude where I never really questioned why I got cancer, aside from the initial shock,” said Nicole. “I never played victim but instead took it as a challenge and just a bump in the road that will end up leading me to a great, much stronger place.”

Nicole bravely began an aggressive round of chemotherapy within the week, and 16 days later developed sepsis and nearly lost her life. While in a medically induced coma, the teen suffered two strokes on the right and left hemispheres of her brain, affecting her motor skills and speech. Once stabilized, Nicole was transferred to Blythedale’s Traumatic Brain Injury Unit in late October for intensive rehabilitation and medical management of her complex condition.

Upon arrival, Nicole was extremely weak and unable to move any of her extremities, nor hold up her head. She also required a nasogastric tube for feeding.

“When she was admitted, Nicole was still emerging from an acquired brain injury due to the stroke, she required maximum assistance for all her activities of daily living, and she was still undergoing chemotherapy,” said Dr. Kathy Silverman, Coordinating Pediatrician for the Pediatric, Adolescent and TBI Units. “Her needs were complex, and her treatment plan included being followed closely by the brain injury team and intensive therapy.”

An extremely motivated Nicole would not be down for long. Working tirelessly with her physiatrist and therapists, Nicole quickly gained enough strength to sit up, stand, and ultimately begin walking again.
“I thought the best motivator was using her love for field hockey and lacrosse because this incorporated so much of what we needed to work on... increasing her overall strength and endurance, balance, weight bearing and shifting,” said her physical therapist, Maureen Carroll. “And because of the strokes, we also used a lot of cognitive activities like dual task (a motor activity plus a cognitive activity).”

“I hate being dependent on others, so after I woke up from the coma and had to depend on others for almost everything, I had that drive to get back to my normal state,” said Nicole. “Of course I would listen to Maureen and follow everything she had to say, but I was always pushing the limits. Even after a day of chemo where I didn’t have too much energy, I did not want to waste a day. I wouldn’t let a minute pass by where I wasn’t improving.”

While she regained strength in her weakened body, Jim Desimone, a teacher who specializes in working with patients with brain injury in the Hospital’s on-site Mt. Pleasant Blythedale School, helped her keep pace with her demanding curriculum. He noted the importance of establishing a firm connection with her home district, as well as his need to complete nightly homework - such as reading Nathaniel Hawthorne - in order to best assist her. “Words like ‘hard working’ would be a great injustice to Nicole,” he said. “Her attitude was contagious and the Blythedale staff fed off this. She refused to say ‘No’ or ‘I can’t’. She gave 110% and so did her therapeutic team.”

“Blythedale has a strong interdisciplinary team with each member of the team being expert at what they do,” said Dr. Silverman. “We are well equipped to manage patients with acute rehabilitation needs and complex medical issues.”

By December she was playing lacrosse and field hockey with her physical and occupational therapists in Blythedale’s Therapy Village. According to her enthusiastic medical team, her progress was unprecedented.

Her extremely supportive family, and extended network of friends, helped Nicole celebrate Christmas at Blythedale and ring in a promising New Year.

“Her parents provided incredible support to her and were also an integral part of our team, helping to coordinate her care,” said Dr. Silverman. “Nicole also had many friends who kept in contact with her since her first diagnosis, through her most difficult times, and as she progressed here in therapy. Support from friends and family is key to recovery; it gives hope.”

What was initially projected to be a five or six-month inpatient stay quickly turned to discussion surrounding discharge at the two-month mark.

On January 3rd, and with her cancer in remission, Nicole was well enough to return home. She received follow-up physical and speech therapy at Blythedale for a few weeks following her discharge, and continues to receive chemotherapy. She returned to Greenwich High, on a part-time basis, to attend her AP Biology class.

“Nicole had an amazing attitude and work ethic,” said Dr. Silverman. “It’s not just about what we can do for our patients, but what they do for us. She was special!”

“It is hard for people to comprehend the full extent of what Nicole has been through in such a short time. Only those at Blythedale who lived minute to minute with us, who took this child who literally couldn’t do anything and made her whole, who started as strangers and became a life-long part of our extended family, truly know how grateful we are to have our daughter back,” said Nicole’s mother, Michele. “If Nicole is a miracle, it is only because she had miracle workers.”

To see Nicole’s video on her recovery, please visit www.blythedale.org/story/12/nicoles-miraculous-recovery
In the Spotlight

Blythedale is proud to announce that it has received a Quality of Life grant from the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation. The grant will be used to purchase a SMART Table for the Hospital’s Early Childhood Center, which serves preschoolers with special medical needs. This high-tech, collaborative learning center features a large LCD display and encourages interaction with more than 1,500 downloadable activities and applications. Designed to accommodate children in a wheelchair or who may require other medical equipment, the SMART Table is ideal for those with limited motor skills or impaired mobility.

“We are very grateful to the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation for funding this important piece of equipment,” said Blythedale President and CEO Larry Levine. “We are committed to restoring function, improving mobility and fostering independence in our children with spinal cord injury or illness. This gift will greatly help us in our efforts to accomplish those important goals.”

“The Reeve Foundation’s Quality of Life Grants Program has always been a cornerstone of one of our core beliefs, the power of we. By supporting organizations, like Blythedale, that align with the same beliefs as ours, we are better able to help our community members live more independently,” said Peter T. Wilderotter, President and CEO of the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation.

For more information on Blythedale’s program for children with spinal cord disorders, please visit www.blythedale.org/spinal-cord-disorders-info.

Special Kids of New York Continues Helping Blythedale’s Special Kids

Since 2004, Special Kids of New York has been helping to provide much-needed medical equipment to Blythedale’s patients. Raising more than $280,000 for the Hospital in the last decade, the dedicated group seeks opportunities to purchase equipment that might otherwise be unfunded by traditional insurance plans.

In the past they have purchased cochlear implants for hearing-impaired children, assistive technology, customized wheelchairs and splints, and monthly art therapy classes for a teen. This month, they donated a new iPad to Daniel (pictured at right). The cheerful nine-year-old has undergone two liver transplants, and has complex medical needs, including great difficulty speaking due to the placement of a tracheostomy tube. According to his speech therapist, his new iPad will greatly enhance his ability to communicate with his family and peers, as well as participate more in school. In addition, the organization purchased an additional set of pressure garments for a young girl who suffered extensive burns.

“Special Kids has made such a significant difference in the lives of so many of our patients with the greatest of needs,” said Blythedale Director of Community Relations Lena Cavanna. “We are so very grateful that they have shared their good fortune with children that truly benefit from the extra help.”

The group hosts an annual dinner dance as their major fundraiser, and is quick to respond when they are notified of a child with a specific need.

“We support Blythedale because we were very impressed with the facilities, the caring faculty, and the commitment to children with special needs,” said Special Kids of New York co-founder Ann Settanni. “It is our honor and privilege to work with the staff of Blythedale, who work diligently to make a better life for children in need of specialized services.”
Join Us for a Celebration of Blythedale at Chelsea Piers

On April 16th, Blythedale Children’s Hospital will host a very special event to benefit its young patients, and to honor some important members of its community – longtime Trustee Jon Burnham and his wife, Mimi, along with The Dreyfus Corporation. The Burnhams have been a part of the Blythedale family for more than 40 years. The Dreyfus Corporation, and its President, Charlie Cardona, are long-time supporters of Blythedale, particularly as lead sponsors of the Hospital’s annual golf outing.

This year’s event will be held at The Lighthouse at Chelsea Piers and will include cocktails, followed by an elegant dinner and inspiring program. The event will be emceed by Mehmet Oz, M.D.

Last year’s event was a huge success, with more than 260 supporters in attendance and $520,000 raised. All funds raised from this year’s event will go toward the second phase of the Hospital’s ongoing renovations, which includes an expansion of the Day Hospital and Early Childhood Center. Sponsorship opportunities are available.

Reserve your spot and join us as we toast the strength, courage and tenacity of our extraordinary children!

For more information, or to receive an invitation, please contact Christina Caras at (914) 831-2512 or christinac@blythedale.org.

Calling All Young Supporters

Blythedale is in the process of forming the Blythedale Advisory Council, a group of young professionals who will:

- Be ambassadors for Blythedale by introducing friends, family and colleagues to the Hospital;
- Participate in service projects with our young patients; and
- Give back to Blythedale through philanthropy and fundraising.

Meetings and events will take place in New York City and Westchester and will provide members with the chance to network, socialize and meet others who are committed to giving back.

Please contact Christina Caras, Director of Special Events, at 914-831-2512 or christinac@blythedale.org.

Trade to Benefit Blythedale on May 14

Blythedale Children’s Hospital is thrilled to be participating in BTIG’s 11th Commissions for Charity Day on Tuesday, May 14, 2013. The success of the day is 100% driven by how much business institutional accounts choose to do with BTIG on that day.

“We are thrilled to again be one of the beneficiaries of BTIG’s Charity Day,” said Chief Development Officer Jane MacDonald. “We are very grateful to the firms that have committed to helping Blythedale by trading with BTIG on May 14th, and in doing so, raising significant funds for our Hospital.”

BTIG serves global markets and trades Equities, Equity Derivatives, Fixed Income, Futures and Commodities. Over the last ten years, BTIG’s Charity Day has raised close to $25 million for more than 350 non-profit organizations.

Please support Blythedale Children’s Hospital and all the wonderful work we do to improve the health and quality of life of children by sending your orders to BTIG on May 14th.

For more information, please contact Chief Development Officer Jane MacDonald at (914) 831-2544 or jane.macdonald@blythedale.org.
Rockin’ Holidays with WPLJ

When 95.5 WPLJ takes over the gymnasium at Blythedale Children’s Hospital every December, a good time is had by all. The 21st annual event was certainly no exception to the rule. WPLJ’s syndicated morning show, “Scott and Todd in the Morning”, broadcast its final show of the year in the gym named in their honor and raised more than $150,000 for Blythedale.

D.J.s Scott Shannon and Todd Pettengill, and the rest of the morning show crew, were on hand bright and early, welcoming Blythedale’s patients when the show kicked off at 6:00 a.m. Patients, family members, staff and supporters were treated to performances by recording artist and Matchbox Twenty lead singer Rob Thomas, who returned for his 13th-straight year, along with perennial favorites Holiday Express and WPLJ’s own house band.

At 9:30 a.m., the show recognized a national moment of silence in honor of those who lost their lives at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

“This year’s benefit was particularly uplifting, as we all have heavy hearts following the tragedy in Newtown,” said Larry Levine, President of Blythedale Children’s Hospital. “We are so grateful to Scott and Todd, and all of our friends and supporters, for recognizing the vital importance of our work and providing us with the resources we need to care for children with complicated medical needs.

There is simply no more important task than caring for our children, and Scott and Todd have been behind us, supporting our mission, and raising more than $4 million for more than two decades. It’s simply extraordinary.”

The on-air auction to benefit the Hospital included top-bid items such as lunch with Rob Thomas ($6,025), a meet-and-greet with the Cake Boss ($6,000), and four VIP tickets to the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade ($3,500).

Following the broadcast, Rob Thomas toured the new building and made lengthy bedside visits with several patients who were unable to attend the broadcast in the Hospital’s gym. He joked with them about messy rooms and sibling rivalries, and quipped that he became a singer because it’s “the easiest job in the band.” As always, he didn’t depart until every patient had an autograph in hand and an opportunity to chat with the personable celebrity.
Blythedale Provides Pediatric Training to First Responders

This winter, Blythedale Children’s Hospital, in coordination with the Westchester Regional EMS Office, Westchester County DES, and NYS EMS for Children, offered a special pediatric CME series to first responders of the Westchester EMS region. This series of symposiums, free to attendees, was funded by the Emergency Medical Services for Children Grant Award.

Courses tackled subjects vital to first responders, including Traumatic Brain Injury, Autism, Technology and Care of the Infant or Child, and Child Abuse/Neglect. The subject matter was presented by clinical experts from Blythedale Children’s Hospital, including physicians, nurses, therapists and other clinical experts.

“We are proud to partner with Westchester County Department of Emergency Services in providing this educational series to first responders,” said Blythedale Children’s Hospital Chief Quality Officer Lois Allen. “It affords us the opportunity to share our wide-ranging expertise, as well as to give back to the community in a way that can benefit a broad pediatric population.”

For information on future training opportunities, please contact Lois Allen at (914) 592-7555, ext. 71470, or loisa@blythedale.org.

Spring Into Action and Sprout Some Healthy Habits

Soon to be gone are the cold, dreary days of winter and those unattended New Year’s Resolutions. Spring, associated with new beginnings and warmer weather, is possibly a better time to plant the seeds of change and cultivate healthier practices for the whole family. Marie Roth, registered dietitian for Blythedale and Kohl’s Eat Well, Be Well nutrition outreach program, offers us some simple ways to develop some healthy habits.

Clean up your diet

Shop the perimeter to cut back on processed foods. Most of the nutrient-rich natural foods are located around the perimeter of markets. Build your meals around fruits and vegetables, fish, eggs and other lean protein, low-fat dairy foods, 100% whole grains, nuts, seeds and beans.

Plant a garden to raise nutritional awareness and the intake of vegetables. Children who participate in school or home gardening have more enthusiastic attitudes toward eating more vegetables and expanding their nutritional knowledge.

De-stress

Move more by building more physical activity into your family’s daily routine. Look for opportunities to increase the amount of exercise your family participates in each day. Whether it is walking or riding a bike to school or other local events or errands or taking a walk after dinner each night, exercise plays an important role in weight management, stress management, and healthy sleep patterns.

Get outdoors and help your family reconnect with nature. Scientific studies show that spending time in natural surroundings reduces stress, anxiety, depression, blood pressure, muscle tension, and stress hormone levels. It also improves mood, immune system function and symptoms of ADHD. So take your family to a local or state park, hike one of the many trails available in your area, and look for yoga or tai chi classes taught outside.

Get your Zzzz to help manage stress and lower your risk of developing chronic diseases. Inadequate amounts of sleep make us more susceptible to stressful situations and raise stress hormone levels in the body, which negatively impact overall health. Also note, children who get approximately 10 hours of sleep each night have higher GPAs and much fewer behavioral issues.

Persevere

Perseverance is a key factor in forming new habits. Current research suggests it takes an average of 66 days to form new or break old habits. Repetition of the desired behavior until it is automatically performed is the goal. Those who are most consistent in performing the behavior are most successful in forming new and healthier habits.

These tips are provided by Blythedale and Kohl’s Eat Well, Be Well Nutrition Program. For more information, visit www.blythedale.org/eat-well-be-well.
5K WALKRUN & ROLL
TO KEEP KIDS SAFE

Sunday, May 19, 2013
9:00am—12noon
Franklin D. Roosevelt State Park
All proceeds benefit Blythedale Children’s Hospital’s
Injury Prevention Program.
To register or to sign up, please visit
For more information, contact Jabeen Dinzey, Director of
Volunteer Services, at 914.831.2428 or jdinzey@blythedale.org

A Celebration of Blythedale
Tuesday, April 16, 2013 – Join us as we host our
sixth annual spring fundraiser to benefit the children
of Blythedale! This year’s event will be held at The
Lighthouse at Chelsea Piers, and will honor Jon and Mimi
Burnham and The Dreyfus Corporation.
For more information, please contact Christina Caras at (914) 831-2512 or email her at christinac@blythedale.org.

17th Annual Golf Outing for Blythedale
Monday, September 9, 2013 – Held at the beautiful
Sunningdale Country Club in Scarsdale, this annual event
also includes a putting contest, cocktail reception, dinner,
live auction and a raffle, all to benefit the Hospital’s Parent
Transportation Program.

For more information, please contact Christina Caras at (914) 831-2512 or email her at christinac@blythedale.org.