

➤ A Case for Comfort



When Cindy Kerr's son Ryan was diagnosed with osteosarcoma three years ago, she wanted to

alleviate even a fraction of the fear and discomfort he experienced during chemotherapy. Turning to one of her talents — sewing — she found a solution. “I made him a new pillowcase and would bring it with me every time we had treatment,” Kerr remembers. “I know how excited Ryan was. He couldn't wait to see his new pillowcase.”

Here, at a hospital renowned for its clinical excellence, a patient's emotional and spiritual well-being is given equal importance to his physical health.

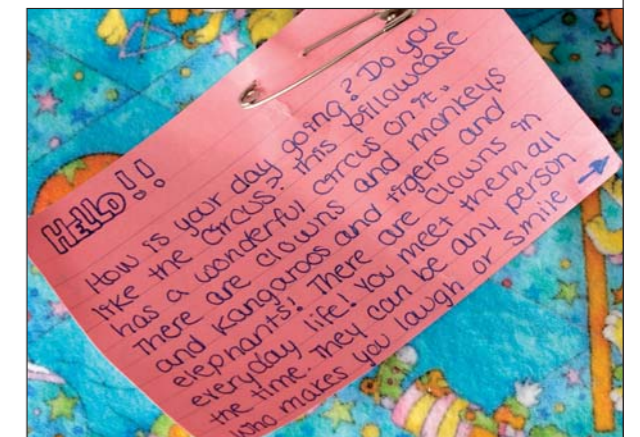
Thinking that other children on Ryan's floor might like something special to brighten their hospital rooms, Kerr brought 35 extra pillowcases to the nurses. “The kids loved them, and I started making more. I couldn't keep up with the demand.” She posted flyers in fabric stores and asked friends to pitch in. Now, homemade pillowcases of every design funnel steadily through the Department of Child Life, Education and Creative Arts Therapy, which coordinates the effort.

“Parents think it's great. They get really excited that someone thought about their child. The pillowcases brighten up the room and personalize the child's space,” says Teri Winston, child life specialist.

Kerr's act, born of a mother's instinct, mirrors Children's Hospital's dedication to treating the whole child. Child life specialists at CHOP, home to one of the nation's first and largest such programs, have pioneered innovative strategies for normalizing the hospital experience for children through play, music and art therapy, inpatient school, even pet visits.

“Small things make the biggest difference. Children don't always understand that the chemo is making them well,” says Winston. “Little things like the pillowcases make them feel good. They think, ‘That's something special and that's for me and that's going to make me feel better today.’”

Personal notes often accompany the pillowcases. Child life specialists at CHOP have been reaching children in innovative ways since 1951.



Soft spot: Maxon Raphael gets comfortable amid an array of handmade pillowcases. Cindy Kerr and friends, working with the Child Life team, have created more than 1,000 one-of-a-kind pillowcases for Children's Hospital patients.