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Family portrait day

A FUN EVENT FOR KIDS IN LONG-TERM CARE

When portrait photographer Missy Bane of Richmond, Va., began looking for ways to donate her photographic talents, the Children's Hospital of Richmond presented an ideal opportunity. As a child, Bane had been treated for scoliosis there. She remembers seeing other children during her stay who had more severe ailments. "That vision has stayed with me my entire life," she says. "When I started thinking about how I could give back to my community, it felt natural to reach out to the hospital."

Bane connected with the chaplain at the hospital, who recommended doing something for the kids in the Transitional Care Unit (TCU).

The children there have severe disabilities and most of them will never be able to attend a traditional school, and so will not have the opportunity to have school portraits made. Moreover, many of the children's families cannot afford to have family portraits made.

In answer to the need, Bane produced Family Portrait Day at the TCU. She set up a mobile studio in the hospital's beautifully landscaped courtyard and arranged a catered lunch for the patients and their families. "We wanted to create a sense of fellowship, a place where everyone could come together, eat and enjoy each other's company," says Bane. "Some of these children would never leave the hospital, so we wanted to bring a pleasant experience to them."

Bane photographed each child individually outdoors, creating images that looked like they were made in an outdoor studio setting, far from any hospital. She presented each family a portrait of their child, a larger image of the entire family and a set of wallets to share with extended family, all free of charge.

Several of the children Bane has photographed have passed away. Her images are among the few visual records of them. "These will be the last memories some of these families have of their children, and the images show them outside, smiling, in the sunshine, not in a hospital room surrounded by medical equipment," says Bane. "My hope is that the families will cherish these portraits in the years to come."

Since beginning the program in 2006, Bane has held four Family Portrait Days. In addition to donating images to the families, she allows the hospital to use her photographs in promotions and as displays at special hospital events. She plans to continue the program as long as the hospital and the kids need her. "This project shows that you don't need to generate a life-changing experience for an entire community to make a difference," says Bane. "You can do so much with a small gesture, just a donation of a few hours of time and a small lab expense. There are so many worthy causes right under our noses in our communities that can use our gifts and talents." ■

If you're interested in helping the Children's Hospital of Richmond, visit www.childrenshosp-richmond.org and click on "Ways You Can Help." To see more from Missy Bane, check out www.missybanephoto.com.

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