



Facilitating healthy lifestyles for youth with disabilities.

Staying active benefits all children, but for youth with physical disabilities, sports can be a game changer. “Youth with disabilities are often socially isolated and less physically active than their peers, regardless of impairment,” explains Rita Penniman, MS, CTRS, RRT, senior recreation therapist and manager of Therapeutic Recreation at MedStar National Rehabilitation Hospital. “Adaptive sports—sports modified so people with physical disabilities can participate—provide an even playing field, which helps build teamwork, confidence, and character, and promotes independence. Plus, it can help improve strength, endurance, and flexibility, reduce body fat, and increase lean mass and bone density.”

That’s why MedStar NRH is dedicated to ensuring that youth with disabilities in the Washington, D.C., region have access to the same opportunities to compete in sports as their non-disabled peers. Through its Youth Adaptive Sports program, which includes recreational and competitive sports, camps, and pop-up clinics for youth ages four to 18, more than 60 children annually are benefiting.

Ben Heim, who has cerebral palsy, is one of them. Since his family moved to the area in 2020, the 13-year-old has participated in nearly every activity offered at MedStar NRH. “Ben enjoys being active and was a founding member of a youth wheelchair basketball program where we lived,” says his mom, Grace. “When my husband was transferred here, we began looking for ways to get him moving again.”

Letter from the president.

Children with disabilities are often hesitant to try sports or other physical activities for a variety of reasons. One of the most common is a lack of confidence.

At MedStar National Rehabilitation Hospital, our Youth Adaptive Sports program eliminates the barriers that prevent them from participating, providing a safe space adapted to their needs that takes away their apprehension. Through the program, we have opened doors of opportunity for countless youth over the past 20 years, helping enhance their health, well-being, and, most importantly, their quality of life.

Sincerely,

John D. Rockwood
Senior Vice President,
MedStar Health
President,
MedStar National Rehabilitation Network

"Adaptive sports—sports modified so people with physical disabilities can participate—provide an even playing field, which helps build teamwork, confidence, and character,"
 —Rita Penniman, MS, CTRS, RRT, senior recreation therapist and manager of Therapeutic Recreation at MedStar National Rehabilitation Hospital

After attending a MedStar NRH pop-up clinic, a one-day event offering a wide range of activities, Ben was hooked. He has participated in adaptive cycling, wheelchair tennis, sled hockey, the youth camps, and still enjoys wheelchair basketball.

He was also first to sign-up for the Wheels in Motion Teen Camp first offered in 2022. "Designed to help participants learn to be more independent, it focuses on activities of daily living in addition to sports, such as cooking, shopping, and using public transportation," says Penniman, who served as camp director.



"Ben is super social, very competitive, and wants to do things on his own," says Grace. "So, he loved the Teen Camp and felt honored to be included since he wasn't 13 yet."

She adds, "We are grateful for the opportunities he has had through MedStar NRH and are committed to spreading the word about the importance of adaptive sports programs so that athletes like Ben can live independent, fulfilling lives."

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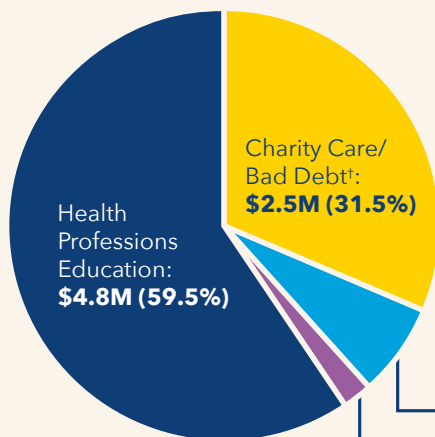
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2022 Community benefit contribution: \$8.1M

*Includes subsidies, community health improvement services, community building activities, financial contributions, and community benefit operations
 †Includes unfunded government-sponsored programs.

Community Services*:
\$0.6M (6.9%)
 Research:
\$0.2M (2.0%)

To learn more about the community health programs at MedStar National Rehabilitation Hospital, please visit [MedStarHealth.org/CommunityHealth](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/CommunityHealth)

It's how we treat people.