



Partnering for Children: Because Every Day Is a Gift

By Melissa Gilbert

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Twelve years ago, I watched helplessly as my son struggled to survive after being born a “severely premature” child at 28 weeks. As a result of my journey I have a deep connection with families who have a child living with a life-threatening condition.

Every day, families are faced with the heart-breaking news that their child is seriously ill. In the United States there are more than 300,000 children living with complex, chronic conditions that may lead to death in childhood. Hospice and palliative care bring expert pain and symptom management, emotional, social, and spiritual support to these children and their families. However, very few children who need this specialized care can get it.

In an ideal world, children should never need palliative care or hospice, but the truth is, they do. Palliative care should be available at the time of diagnosis, throughout the course of treatment and to guide the family as they transition back into “normal” life or, through their grief if the child dies. Having early access to this support can help prevent so much unnecessary suffering.

There are too many statistics, too many diseases with long names, but at the heart of it all, there is a child – and a family. A family facing one of the most difficult experiences any family can face. They deserve support and care from every one of us.

To raise awareness about the benefits of pediatric palliative care and hospice, I am proud to tell you about a new national campaign, *Partnering for Children*, that is working to ensure these children and families get the highest quality healthcare they deserve. As Board President of the Children’s Hospice and Palliative Care Coalition, I am serving as the spokesperson for *Partnering for Children* and would like to invite you to please join our efforts. Together we can make a profound and lasting difference to bring comfort to children and families when they need it most. To learn more about the campaign and how to get involved, visit www.partneringforchildren.org.

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Ms. Gilbert, the actor, director and producer, is board president of Children’s Hospice and Palliative Care Coalition. In that capacity, she also serves as spokesperson for Partnering for Children, a collaborative effort between the Children’s Hospice and Palliative Care Coalition, National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, and the National Hospice Foundation.