



# NASHUA CHILDREN'S HOME



Enriching the Lives of Children and Families Since 1903

## Director's Corner

By David Villiotti, Executive Director

In a card to her mom for Mother's Day, a nine-year girl at Nashua Children's Home, wrote, "I hope you're doing okay during Coronavirus Season." We've adopted that title and we've now been in Coronavirus Season since mid-March, with no particular end in sight.



girls, including home visits and community jobs and to allow only staff, kids and a periodic necessary repair person to access the grounds and building of 125 Amherst Street and

86 Concord Street.

On Friday, August 28, we celebrated the end-of-summer and beginning of school with a Luau for staff and kids, highlighted with a slideshow entitled "Coronavirus Season," and the 947 photos comprising the slideshow were an emotional journey for those Nashua Children's Home staff, who have shown up for work every day, giving their best effort for the boys and girls of Nashua Children's Home. That being said, it's the boys and girls who have been on a shift that never ends, confined largely to the buildings and grounds of Nashua Children's Home as we enacted basically a lockdown, with a singular focus on the well-being of the children, and of the staff charged with their care.

We are blessed though with a ballfield and gym, and instituted a daily structure consisting of an indoor art or STEM activity in the morning, an outdoor or gym activity in the afternoon, and dodgeball, always dodgeball, in the evenings. Remote learning periods were held in the morning and afternoon. To the extent possible, we set up kids with on-campus jobs with our amazing support staff, working in the kitchen, with housekeeping, with maintenance. The activities brought together the boys and girls of all of our units, Younger Boys, Younger Girls, Older Boys, Older Girls...groupings of kids that had previously not had much interaction with each other. One of the silver linings of this pandemic has been the sense of community that evolved here at Nashua Children's Home, kids and staff broadening their interactions, supporting each other throughout. We witnessed 16-year-old boys with a hard exterior, being kind to the little kids, coaching them in basketball, not throwing them out in kickball, but instead allowing them

It all began on Friday, March 13, when we were informed by the Nashua School District that there would be no school the following week, followed two days later by the Governor ordering that all New Hampshire schools remain closed for a two week period. This closure was then extended through April vacation, then for the balance of the school year. Our response at the time was to curtail all off-grounds activities for the boys and



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to reach base safely. We had 17-year-old girls braiding the hair of 9-year-olds, painting their nails as well. Every morning at 10am, like a herd of buffalo, or a flock of chickens, groups of kids converged on one of our dining rooms and excitedly engaged in activities requiring markers, scissors, old magazines, and always, always, thinking to come up with the best answers, exercising care to construct the best model airplanes, or to prepare their egg with landing gear to survive a drop from the second floor.

Then there were the special events, generally held on Fridays... often punctuated by a march through the building, around the grounds, down Amherst Street. There was team jersey day, '80s Day, Disney Day, Pride March in June. And the celebration of holidays... Easter with the requisite coloring of Easter Eggs and an impromptu drive-by visit by the Easter Bunny, Memorial Day, 4th of July. There were activities that were the first of their kind at Nashua Children's Home... bonfires in the backfield, and of course, Camp NCH. This was to be a banner summer at Nashua Children's Home. Camp registration began early, in January, with most kids enrolled for multiple weeks of day or overnight camps. Then, the pandemic, the lockdown, no camps. There was Camp NCH!! There was no pool, but there was Slip 'N' Slide, squirting with the hose, soakers, and small individual pools for the little kids. There were celebrations... talent shows, basketball tournaments, Treat Yo'Self Days where every unit ordered out for dinner.

We had tremendous community support as well, financial contributions due to increased costs, regular pizza drop-offs that continue, and words of encouragement as our activities were chronicled daily on the Nashua Children's Home Facebook page.

As you might sense, there was a palpable positive vibe for much of

Coronavirus Season, smiles and good humor abounded, kids and staff alike. Our "campus" had slowly opened up, to on-grounds, masked, socially distant visits by family members, later extended to state child-protective workers, probation officers, CASAs, and guardians-ad-litem, to some off-grounds, outside activities like hikes, beaches, drive-ins, but never to unrestricted interaction with the general public.

And then came the question, we had never anticipated needing to answer back in March... "WHAT about School?" Given our singular focus on the health & well-being of kids and staff and our love affair with the number zero (as in ZERO positive COVID cases), we weren't about to run the risk of returning kids to public school classrooms, thus staked out our position in late July that we would be exercising the remote only option for those boys and girls enrolled in public school classrooms when school was scheduled to begin in late August.

So, as the school year is now in session, and Coronavirus Season continues, we're bringing you, excerpted from the slideshow, Caronavirus Season at Nashua Children's Home. We hope you enjoy the pages to follow. 🌟🌟🌟







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