

# Cultivating Hope

## The Vital Role of Pediatric Palliative & Hospice Social Workers

Caring for a child with a life-limiting illness requires a compassionate, multidisciplinary approach. Pediatric palliative and hospice social workers play an integral role in this care team, providing emotional, practical and bereavement support. By collaborating with medical professionals and social service agencies, they help families navigate serious illness and focus on what matters most.

### Addressing Family Support Needs

Children with complex conditions require care from multiple specialists and agencies. Social workers assess family needs and help secure vital resources such as home health nursing, specialized equipment and therapy services. Coordinating these supports allows families to focus on time together.

### Facilitating Goals of Care Conversations

As a child's illness progresses, families may need to shift their focus from curative treatments to prioritizing comfort and quality of life. Social workers facilitate these discussions, helping families articulate their values and make informed decisions.

### A Collaborative Approach to Care

Pediatric palliative and hospice social workers are key members of a team that includes physicians, nurses, aides, music and massage therapists and spiritual counselors. Together, they ensure every child and family receives compassionate, comprehensive care.

### Emotional and Bereavement Support

Pediatric palliative social workers support patients, parents and siblings through emotional challenges, including anticipatory grief. They offer guidance on how children at different developmental stages understand illness and death. Through one-on-one visits and legacy-building activities, they create opportunities for connection and healing.

## When to Make a Referral to the Sunflower Pediatric Program

If you're caring for a child with serious medical needs, the Sunflower Pediatric Program may be able to help. Consider reaching out if the child:

- Has complex medical needs, such as multiple diagnoses, seeing multiple specialists or requiring more medical care over time.
- Is being hospitalized more often than before.
- Has cancer that is no longer responding to treatment.
- Is experiencing worsening health, including:
  - Trouble moving around or becoming more dependent on caregivers.
  - Difficulty communicating.
  - Struggling to eat or tolerate tube feedings.
  - Frequent constipation.

For more information visit [www.SunflowerPediatric.org](http://www.SunflowerPediatric.org)

### WE ARE HERE TO HELP...

If you think palliative or hospice care might be right for a child in your care, we encourage you to call. We're here to provide support, comfort and guidance.

CALL OUR 24-HOUR NUMBER  
(877) 777-5559 AND CHOOSE OPTION 2.

**sunflower**  
**Pediatric Program**  
A program of Choices Healthcare



## Meet Our Newest Team Member: Dr. Sarah Schuessler

**Brief Bio:** A native midwesterner, I grew up in the Chicago suburbs, moved all over the east coast and midwest for medical training, before happily landing in Lancaster.

Outside of work, my husband and I have two young daughters and are fully immersed in the all-encompassing joys (and challenges) of infant and toddler parenting. In any rare spare time, I enjoy jogging and fitness classes, travel, baking, reading and choral singing.

### Why Pediatrics:

I always knew I wanted to work with children; in fact, as a child myself, I wanted to be either a teacher or a pediatrician when I grew up. I kept an open mind in medical school and considered other specialties, but it took just one day in the pediatrics clinic to figure out that was where I was meant to be. Children are amazing - they are innately resilient, genuine, funny, curious, clever, brave, charming and empathetic. Being trusted by a child's parent to be their doctor is a true honor, every time.

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*Love and trust, in the space  
between what's said and what's  
heard in our life, can make all  
the difference in the world.*

— Fred Rogers

### Education and Specialty:

BS, Chemistry and Music,  
The College of William and Mary

MD, Georgetown University School of Medicine

Internal Medicine-Pediatrics Residency,  
Rush University Medical Center

Hospice and Palliative Medicine Fellowship,  
Johns Hopkins Hospital

## Grief Camps Available for Children and Teens

S'mores on an open campfire, a bubble slide, arts and crafts, and a parachute – what do these all have in common? They are just some of the fun activities at Camp Chimaqua, our Pathways Center for Grief & Loss grief camp for kids. If you know a child between the ages of 6 and 12 who is grieving the loss of a loved one encourage them to attend. The registration deadline is April 18th. Thanks to the generous support of the community, registration is \$25 and financial assistance is available. **For more information, visit [www.pathwaysthroughgrief.org](http://www.pathwaysthroughgrief.org) or call (717) 391-2413.**

Camp Dragonfly is also available for children between the ages of 6 and 15 from June 6 thru 8 presented by our sister organization, Hospice of Central PA. Visit [www.hospiceofcentralpa.org](http://www.hospiceofcentralpa.org) for more info.

### CAMP CHIMAQUA

Grief camp for kids ages 6 -12  
May 16-18, 2025  
Gretna Glen, Lebanon  
[www.PathwaysThroughGrief.org](http://www.PathwaysThroughGrief.org)

### CAMP DRAGONFLY

Grief camp for kids ages 6 -15  
June 6-8, 2025  
Camp Hebron, Halifax  
[www.HospiceofCentralPa.org](http://www.HospiceofCentralPa.org)

