

Hospice is for the Living

So many equate hospice to death, but for one hospice program at CarePartners in Asheville, NC, a team of talented and compassionate professionals and volunteers have demonstrated to families and patients that it's about living, not dying.

Taylor's Story

Taylor is a 16-year old girl diagnosed with MERRF, a genetic disorder that affects the functions of cells. Prior to being admitted to hospice in December 2009, Taylor's sister, Brittany, passed away from the same disease in April 2009. As a result, when Taylor entered the hospice program, she was fearful and knew what fate had in store. Her parents were equally afraid and focused on her death, rather than her life. Taylor's care team had a big task in front of them – to engage the family's trust and to make Taylor smile again.

Amy Pike, social worker, and integral member of Taylor's care team, brainstormed with other team members to come up with an idea that would truly create some lasting memories. Current members of the team include a chaplain, CNA, music therapist and nurse. After doing some research, they learned that Taylor, as well as her deceased sister, had been deeply involved with a therapeutic riding center called Mountin' Hopes where she had bonded with a horse named Tonkka.

It was very important for the hospice staff to give Taylor joy in her final days, so they worked diligently with Taylor's parents as well as Mountin' Hopes to make a trip to see Tonkka happen. Taylor was driven to the facility via medical transport. While there, the meeting was bittersweet. Taylor brought along her saddle and donated it to the facility so that another rider would benefit. In return, staff at Mountin' Hopes removed Tonkka's bridle and handed it to Taylor, replacing it with another. The bridle now sits in Taylor's room.

Hospice Restores Trust

Today, a family that was once filled with fear and doubt now breathes a little steadier. They have begun to let more people into their circle and have even allowed a volunteer to come in to read to Taylor. One day, the family hopes to have a scholarship set up in the twins' names to celebrate their lives. It's Taylor's 17th birthday on St. Patrick's Day and her caregiving team hopes to make a second trip to visit Tonkka.

For more information about CarePartners, visit: www.CarePartners.org.

