

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SERVICE AT SETON

Elizabeth Seton Pediatric Center pays tribute to National Volunteer Month this April with a spotlight on three "neighborhood helpers"

YONKERS, NY (April 2018)—To become a volunteer at the Elizabeth Seton Pediatric Center, you must be at least 17 years of age and must commit to a minimum of three months of service. Other non-negotiables that aren't listed in our volunteer application? You must possess an impassioned calling to help children in need. You must believe that love has the power to heal. And you must be willing to have your life forever changed.

"I know I'm making a difference," said volunteer George Vasilakis, a high school senior. "All the evidence I need is in Maria's face, which lights up when she sees me, or in Kevin's laugh when he hits me with a 'Wild Draw Four' card in UNO. Their zest for life is certainly contagious and they make a difference in my life simply by reminding me to live it," he said.

While volunteerism is required as part of his student experience at Fordham Preparatory School, Vasilakis said that the bonds he's formed will keep him volunteering past graduation. "We can all get caught up in the hustle and stresses of everyday life, but interacting with the kids definitely reminds me to just slow down, smile and enjoy life."

Volunteer Evelyn Foley, a nurse at St. John's Riverside Hospital, draws inspiration from the children who reside at the Pediatric Center, as well. "I see the qualities of courage and acceptance for what they have to deal with in their lives," she said. "It helps me to have faith and confidence in what I have to deal with in my life. It helps me to have tremendous gratitude."

Vasilakis and Foley are two of 40 volunteers at the Pediatric Center who are "neighborhood helpers," or companions who spend quality time with our children. "Whether it's accompanying a child to an activity, reading a bedtime story or simply holding a hand and being a comforting presence, our 'neighborhood helpers' become a vital part of our holistic care team," explained Vanessa Andrews, Director of Child Life and Therapeutic Recreation and Coordinator of Volunteer Services.

Another "neighborhood helper," Jeanne Holcomb, is a retiree who has volunteered at the Pediatric Center since its establishment in 1988; she is the Pediatric Center's longest serving volunteer. According to Holcomb, the most important part of forming a bond with a resident is to recognize that each child is different. "I try to discover what makes them laugh and that first laugh establishes a rapport," she said. During her decades of service, Holcomb has witnessed many special moments, such as watching a child take her very first steps. "I feel attached to the kids and to many of the staff," Holcomb said. "I feel like a sort of zany great aunt to the whole Elizabeth Seton family!"

For information on volunteering at the Pediatric Center, visit setonpediatric.org/volunteers-service-hours.

About the Elizabeth Seton Pediatric Center

Now celebrating its 30th year of service, the Elizabeth Seton Pediatric Center is a not-for-profit, post-acute medical center that is nationally recognized as a leader in the care of technology-dependent and medically complex children. Caring for 169 children, the Pediatric Center is the largest provider in the country for this unique population. The Pediatric Center offers vital medical, nursing, therapeutic and educational services that these children need to reach their greatest potential. The children who live at the Pediatric Center receive short-term interventions, as well as long-term care where the Pediatric Center becomes a "home." In this case,

children can spend years receiving expert medical care and respiratory services delivered by a full team of highly-trained specialists and nursing staff, 24-hours a day. The Pediatric Center is New York's leader in the care of a critically underserved population of children who need long-term respiratory support to live. Children receive top-quality educational services thanks to the on-site John A. Coleman School. Our pastoral care, Child Life, recreation, social work and transportation teams fully support families, welcome them with open hearts and make the Pediatric Center their home. We have a five-star rating in the "Best Nursing Homes" category of *U.S. News & World Report*. Our state-of-the-art, child-centered building is the only LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold certified "green" children's post-acute care center in the country. The Elizabeth Seton Pediatric Center is sponsored by the Sisters of Charity of New York and is supported by the St. Elizabeth Seton Children's Foundation. Other supported organizations of the Foundation include the John A. Coleman School and the Children's Rehabilitation Center. Learn more about the Elizabeth Seton Pediatric Center at www.setonpediatric.org and find us on Facebook at facebook.com/setonpediatric.

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Volunteer George Vasilakis with Elizabeth Seton Pediatric Center resident, Maria, at a Valentine's event hosted at the Pediatric Center back in February. Photo provided by enCourage Kids Foundation

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