

NONPROFIT SPOTLIGHT

## Splashes of Hope offers team-building events for a cause

Cause-related team-building events can help employees refine their staff dynamics while providing a common meaningful purpose that helps their communities. Studies show these programs can enhance brand reputation as well as employee recruitment, engagement and retention. For Huntington-based Splashes of Hope, these events are an integral part of sponsorship and fundraising programs.

Founded in 1996, Splashes of Hope helps patients heal through art. Its network of volunteer and freelance artists custom-design murals and other artistic projects to transform hospitals, social services facilities and family homes, lifting patients' spirits through the calming effects of visual storytelling.

Those who suffer from illness, or have a loved one who does, know how sterile and dreary medical and treatment environments can be. To children, these environments also prove very intimidating and even frightening. When a patient is fighting a serious condition, every aspect of his or her environment counts. This is where Splashes of Hope comes in. The organization believes that positive imagery and an appealing environment can help generate a positive attitude and as a result support the healing process.

"Children in particular love to engage with our murals and ceiling art," said Splashes of Hope Founder and Director Heather Buggée. "They feel transported to a safe place where they can mentally recharge while they mend. What's more, our 'splashed' facilities have noticed the great positive impact on patients and how visitors and staff connect to the art as well."

Since its inception, the organization has installed hundreds of murals and focal points at facilities and homes, including the Stony Brook Children's Cancer Center, the Northport VA Medical Center, Northwell Health, and many others across Long Island. The response has been so positive that Splashes of Hope now has a long waiting list of projects in need of sponsors. The organization hopes that the popularity of cause-related team-building exercises will help businesses as well as the

families and facilities they support.

"Corporate sponsors are one of our greatest contributors, and those who hold team-building events for their employees find them to be a highly creative outlet and a deeply moving experience," Buggée said. "Connecting with the community is important for employees, especially in today's stressful work environments. The corporate program gives employees a chance to build camaraderie and work together as a team, while helping the community and giving back at the same time. It's a win-win for the employees and the community."

Sponsors include Salesforce, EisnerAmper, TiniFiber, ASIS International Long Island Chapter and Estée Lauder among others. And sponsors such as Astoria Bank consistently support multiple projects annually.

"For many years, we've worked with Splashes of Hope to provide funding for a number of transformational projects, including several at hospitals, special needs schools and day camps," said Brian Edwards, the executive vice president of Astoria Bank, which is headquartered in Lake Success. "Their bright, hand-painted murals transform clinical areas into more comforting spaces and ease the anxiety of patients and their families. Our employees also enjoy volunteering as painters to help create the artwork, so it gives us the opportunity to really give back and make a difference in the communities we serve."

As for the families of children whose rooms have been "splashed," they couldn't be more grateful. The murals are designed based on each child's wish – some whimsical and playful, others more adventurous and dynamic. In the end, it is their own personal outlet, and parents can see a difference right away.

Anne Marie Chang, whose son Ethan was selected the organization's Splash Star in 2015, says the finished product goes beyond art. "It's more than just a mural or a painting hanging on the wall – it's the love that comes



from those murals and the love that comes through the artists that are here – somebody painted it just for him. That it's special and unique to just him and nobody else has one like it, and he knows that it came from people who really, genuinely want him to have the best quality of life possible."

While corporations and organizations represent the majority of sponsors, Buggée says that individuals are becoming more involved, whether by volunteering directly with Splashes of Hope, or by gathering groups of friends and sponsoring their own events to help someone they love or an organization that is important to them. "People are beginning to add a purposeful, creative project to commemorate a birthday party or a bridal shower," she said.

Splashes of Hope works with corporate and individual sponsors who choose to contribute in three ways: through the team-building events, sponsoring a child's custom mural or giving "Friend on the Mend Gift Bags" to young patients, which includes Splashes of Hope coloring book, puppet and crayons. For more information, visit [splashesofhope.org](http://splashesofhope.org).