



SMILE CONNECTION

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2026

From Surprises to SMILES

When Ronald Jr. was born, the delivery room went silent.

And then, breaking the silence, came the shocking announcement: “He has a cleft lip and palate.” This was a surprise to Tonisha and Ronald Sr., who never received a clear view of the baby’s face on ultrasounds.

Nurses sprang into action, assuring the parents that everything would be okay and that the surgeon had been called. Dr. Samson arrived, bringing an air of calm, and promised Ronald Sr. and Tonisha that he was going to be involved in every step of their son’s care.

“We were connected to the Clinic right away in the hospital,” Tonisha remembers. Ronald Jr. was diagnosed with a full cleft lip and palate and did not pass his newborn hearing screening. Ronald Jr. had his lip repaired at three months old.

“We arrived at the Clinic to get a bottle for Ronald Jr.’s feeding and with so many questions,” Tonisha says. “I wanted to know: how will he be affected later on? What will his speech and development be like? The Clinic was able to answer all our questions.”



Ronald Jr. had his palate repaired at the age of 1 and – like many children with a cleft palate – he underwent a procedure to place tubes in his ears to help with the drainage of fluid, especially since it was discovered that he had abnormally small ear canals. Additionally, Rachel Sharnetzka, the Clinic Audiologist, lent Ronald Jr. hearing aids. However, his lack of speech persisted. For his first 6.5 years of life, he remained largely nonverbal and was teased at school.

Ronald Jr.’s care team recommended an MRI, which revealed cholesteatomas - skin growth in the middle ear - impeding his hearing.

Further investigation revealed significant damage to the middle ear bone structure, which meant that Ronald Jr. would need hearing aids permanently. “He started talking a lot around the age of 7,” Tonisha shares of the now 9-year-old. “I attribute that both to his improved hearing and confidence!”

Thanks to the care of the Clinic and his social spirit, Ronald Jr. now makes his voice heard! He thrives in school, teachers understand him, and he has made lots of friends.

In addition to his initial surgeries, he has undergone a bone graft, bone augmentation, and an expander placement in his jawline to prepare him for orthodontics. Last year, he had a palate lengthening procedure as well.

The only brother of six sisters, Ronald Jr. embodies the joy of boyhood – an avid Ravens fan and an expert constructor of LEGO creations. His dream is to play in the NFL.

“We want him to be successful,” Tonisha says. “Not by our standards, but by his.”

The Clinic has not only provided answers, but peace and guidance for Ronald Sr. and Tonisha. “We’ve been fearful like most other parents,” Tonisha says. “But our strength comes from God, we pray, and we listen to all of the Clinic’s recommendations.”

Spring Brings Growth and New Ideas

Spring is a time of new beginnings, and our team at LCPC is excited to usher in warmer weather and new ideas.

We recently returned from the Annual Session of the American Cleft Palate Craniofacial Association (ACPA) in Boston, MA. Ten of our team members attended in person with two joining remotely. We attended dozens of presentations and courses to learn and share the latest advances in cleft care.

Our Director of Team Services, Lexi Stauffer, gave a stimulating talk as part of a panel about serving unique populations and overcoming barriers to care. Many cleft teams serve patients with differing needs and we support a significant population of Amish families. Our team works hard to be sensitive to their needs and all the cultural choices that shape the lives of our patients. We hope that sharing these experiences may inform how other teams treat their own patients and improve outcomes.

Lauren Madhoun, PhD, our feeding specialist, presented on milk thickening practices for infants with a cleft palate. Ensuring proper nutrition for infants with a cleft is absolutely crucial to their wellbeing. Babies must grow to a certain size before it is safe to repair their cleft.

Finally, I was honored to start my second year on the ACPA Board of Directors. We are working hard to update standards for team care. ACPA's standards are a set of rules that all teams agree to follow in order to ensure the highest quality of care.



As the first U.S. cleft team, we continue to lead by example.

Thank you for your support of LCPC!

Elizabeth K. Prada

Liz Prada, DMD, MPH
Executive Director and Pediatric Dentist



LCPC Team members at ACPA

SMILES FOR SPRING EVENTS AND YOUR GENEROSITY



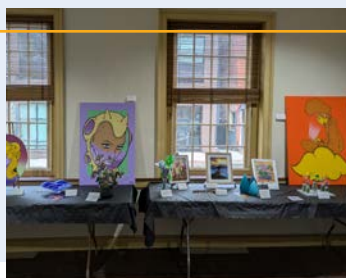
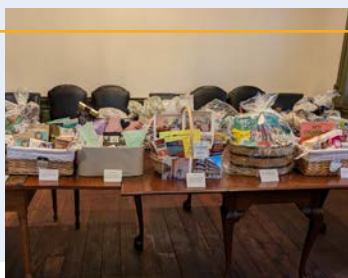
**Deanna
Meyler, PhD**
Director of
Development

We celebrated the smiles of our patients and raised critical funds for their care in March.

It was a wonderful evening. The best part? Watching everyone have fun and bidding on art and themed baskets through our online silent auction. Children made more art during the evening, guests listened to the talented Corey Aiden, everyone explored the historic building, families snacked on treats from our goody bags like Herr's potato chips, Hershey's chocolate bars, and candy from the Vintage Candy Shop, and all with the background of incredible art donated by patients, family members, and others who care about our mission. This was our most successful art event so far and we hope you can join us next year. April 2, from 4 to 8 pm, at 123 N. Prince Street is already scheduled!

Event success was critical as we remain uncertain how federal level decisions will impact our patients. We are already experiencing fewer donations as our economy shifts. Approximately 25% of our annual budget is from the support of our incredible community. Your generosity makes it possible for us to continue to accept every child for care, no matter their ability to pay. With upcoming cuts to Medicaid/Medical Assistance, there is deep concern that we will be asked to cover additional care costs previously reimbursed by Medicaid.

We want to make sure you know how much we appreciate you and have several upcoming events like our Day of Gratitude on June 6. Make sure to get your free tickets for this fun event from 2 to 4 pm at the Amos Herr Park East Pavilion.





EXCITING SPRING HIGHLIGHTS



NEW ENDOSCOPE IMPROVES TREATMENT

The Clinic has recently added a new high-resolution endoscope to perform nasopharyngoscopy, a procedure that uses a small camera through the nose to view the palate during speech. This allows our Team providers to watch how the palate and surrounding muscles move in patients with velopharyngeal insufficiency. With this information, we can make more informed decisions when developing individualized treatment and surgical plans.

Grateful for Generous Grants

- **The Livingston, Trout, and Mellinger Medical Research Fund recently awarded the Clinic \$9,169 to support our research efforts.** Thank you for helping us make sure we continue to provide the very best care through research.
- **The organizers of the Gainer-Race Memorial Softball Weekend recently gave the Clinic \$15,600 to support patient care!** Thank you for believing in the futures of our patients! The next Softball Weekend is May 29-31.
- **Kiwanis Club of Lititz Area gave \$25,000 for patient care in March.** This community service organization makes sure we can continue to accept every patient for care. Their events, like the Lititz Chocolate Walk, make their generosity possible. We hope to see you on October 10 for the next Chocolate Walk!

Study Identifies Functions that May Predict Positive Patient Outcomes

The Clinic is excited to be part of a new National Institutes of Health (NIH) funded LEAP study. The study shares practitioners between high-ranking craniofacial care centers across the United States to explore how teams function clinically and administratively. The goal is to identify team functions that may predict positive patient outcomes. Participants will prepare insights across clinics for best-in-class approaches.

A NEW SMILE ON THE BOARD

We are thrilled to share that Katie Ruiz has joined our Board of Directors. Katie brings years of healthcare legal experience to our volunteer board. Katie says, "The services the Clinic provides to children and families truly strengthen our community, but what inspires me most is the dedication of the team who shows up every day to do this work."





Lancaster Cleft Palate Clinic

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From Surprises to SMILES

CELEBRATING Smiles This Spring



Gainer-Race Memorial Softball Weekend

Play ball, make a donation, or volunteer May 29-31 and make a difference in the lives of children across Lancaster County, including our patients! The FREE kids game for all abilities and kids carnival is Saturday (ages 4-12)! Follow their Facebook page for more information.



Day of Gratitude

Mark your calendar and get your FREE tickets for June 6 from 2 to 4 pm to

share a picnic with us at the Amos Herr Park East Pavilion. We want to thank you for making our work possible with games for all ages, cotton candy, and more.



July is Cleft and Craniofacial Awareness and Prevention Month

Have dinner at Snitz Creek Brewery in Palmyra

on July 9 between 4:30 and 7:30 and help

us raise awareness during Cleft and Craniofacial Awareness and Prevention Month! We will have a table at the restaurant with a chance to win a gift card.

AND Snitz Creek is donating 10% of the profits from dinner during our time there back to the Clinic to

support patient care! It will be a fun and delicious evening and we want to share it with you. Snitz Creek Brewery is located at 2701 Horseshoe Pike, Palmyra, PA.



SNITZ CREEK
BREWERY



ARE YOU ON SOCIAL MEDIA? We have an active Facebook page and are building our Instagram following. Please join us at facebook.com/lancastercleftpalateclinic and [@lancastercleftpalateclinic](https://instagram.com/lancastercleftpalateclinic).