



SMILE CONNECTION

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2026

Sharing Warm SMILES

**Ethan Stull has a special smile
and he's not shy about sharing it.**

His parents, Michael and Ani, describe nine-year-old Ethan as energetic, outgoing, confident, and a lover of people. His magnetic personality and kind heart spread smiles wherever he goes.

From the beginning of their marriage, Michael and Ani discussed adoption. "Faith is a big part of our lives so we prayed about it a lot," Michael said. "We felt called to it." They moved to Lancaster for Ani's job and while considering what to do with the money they'd made off the sale of their previous home, Ani shared that she wanted to put it toward adoption and they agreed it was time.

Ethan was adopted from China as a toddler and arrived at his forever home in the United States just before his second birthday. Michael and Ani specifically considered an international special needs adoption, particularly cleft lip and/or palate, because as Lancaster residents, they felt reassured that their proximity to the Lancaster Cleft Palate Clinic would afford their child with excellent resources to thrive.

China had the most stable adoption program at the time, the Stulls recalled, and they applied for adoption after receiving encouragement to pursue a special needs adoption from an orphan care ministry at their church. Michael and Ani matched with Ethan when he was one and a half and met him a few months later.

As the Stull's have three biological daughters – Grace, Kate, and Millie – Michael stayed with the girls while Ani went to China with a friend to bring Ethan home. Her friend had also adopted children with a cleft from China, so she was able to provide support and encouragement to Ani.

"It was so exciting," Ani said, reflecting on her first encounter with Ethan. "I had been waiting for so long to meet him." The whole Stull family shared in the joy. The girls made a Welcome Home banner to greet their brother.

While in China, Ani learned that Ethan had his cleft lip repaired, but not his palate, so upon returning home, that was a priority. Dr. Samson performed the surgery to close his palate when he was 2.5 years old.

In 2022, Ethan was diagnosed with velopharyngeal insufficiency (VPI). This is a condition where the palate has inadequate anatomy and/or function to produce certain speech sounds. He had a palatal lengthening and buccal flap surgery to improve his speech which cured his VPI.



Since then, Ethan has had a bone graft surgery and worn expanders. Eventually, he'll get braces.

"We've found so much support for Ethan at the Clinic," Michael shared. "We love that there are all the specialists in one place for a holistic treatment plan. My son gets to have treatment at this place that has such a pioneering approach."

Ethan looks forward to seeing Dr. Samson at Clinic Team Days. "He loves Dr. Samson," Michael said. "And Dr. Samson loves Ethan. They joke and make each other smile."

Michael and Ani know Ethan will continue spreading smiles as he grows and continues to become who he was made to be. "I believe that whatever he wants to do, he'll be able to do it," Ani said.

Michael agreed, recounting how his faith has assured him that Ethan will use his energy and outgoing spirit to bless and help others.

And Ethan is already blessing others and brightening their days, with his special smile.

Sunshine and Smiles All Summer

We hope that you are enjoying long summer days with extra sunshine and relaxation! At LCPC, we are excited to hear about everyone's summer plans, including trips to the beach, visits to a cabin in the woods, relaxing at the pool, and even a few trips abroad! For our patients headed to the beach and pool who have ear tubes or other conditions that require water precautions, please feel free to check in with Rachel Sharnetzka, our audiologist, if you are interested in having custom ear plugs made to protect your ears.

We are thankful for all of our patient families and clinical supporters who had the opportunity to join us for a beautiful "Day of Gratitude" event at Amos Herr Park in Landisville, PA. Our staff had a blast celebrating our community and sharing a day of fun with our patients.

Our Parent Council is actively collaborating with our staff to support new families affected by cleft and craniofacial conditions in Central PA. They will be unveiling a new mentorship and support program to pair existing team families with new parents who are just beginning their journey with LCPC. Despite the challenges and occasional dark times that come with receiving a new and unexpected medical diagnosis for their baby, we want to ensure that parents see light and sunshine at the end of their tunnel.

Thank you for your support of LCPC!



Elizabeth K. Prada

Liz Prada, DMD, MPH
Executive Director and Pediatric Dentist



LCPC Team members

DAY OF GRATITUDE CELEBRATES CLINIC ALUMNI SMILES



Deanna
Meyler, PhD
Director of
Development

We had the very best time during our Day of Gratitude event in June.

Our younger guests jumped in a bounce house, learned about brain safety, climbed in a fire truck and in a tent, picked out a book to keep, devoured cotton candy, and sang karaoke. Our older guests watched a K9 demonstration, practiced throwing and kicking a football, enjoyed popcorn, and learned to tie knots. And so much more! The time was full of lots of things to enjoy.

In addition to all the fun things, this year we invited former patients to come share about what they have accomplished because of the bright smiles we helped them achieve. The time was very moving as these alumni shared some of

their accomplishments, their gratitude for the practitioners that supported them as children, and words of encouragement to our current patients and families at the event. Big smiles, tears, and hugs were abundant during this special moment. We will definitely be inviting alumni for this moment again next year! **In 2027, our Day of Gratitude will be June 5.** Plan now to join in all the gratitude.

Why do we have a Day of Gratitude?

Because we could not help so many children achieve a bright smile for a bright future without those who care about our mission. Our patients, their families, our volunteers, our staff, and our supporters make their futures possible.

Thank you for this!

SPREADING SMILES BEYOND LANCASTER



Camryn Heister, MS, CCC, Speech-Language Pathologist with the Clinic, takes her training and passion to patients around the world. For the past two years, she has worked with the Smiles International Foundation to help even more children with clefts eat, speak, learn, and thrive.

Q: How is this work meaningful to you?

A: One of my greatest passions is increasing access to interdisciplinary cleft care. Children with cleft lip and palate often require long-term care from multiple specialists and in many areas of the world, this type of team care is not easily accessible. Every trip reminds me that these children are so much more than their diagnosis.

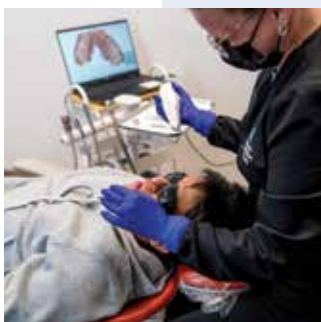
Q: What do you learn from these trips and what do you bring back to better support LCPC patients through these experiences?

A: These trips continually reinforce the importance of teamwork, flexibility, and individualized care. Every patient and every setting is different, so we often need to problem-solve quickly and collaborate closely to make the best decisions for each child. These experiences deepen my understanding of the barriers families face in accessing care. [It] helps me become a more compassionate clinician and advocate for our patients and families.

Q: What do you want our supporters to know about these trips?

A: I am incredibly grateful for the support I have received from the Clinic. That support allows me to share the skills and knowledge I have developed through our clinic with children and providers who may not otherwise have access to specialized cleft speech services.

SUMMER GROWTH AND GRATITUDE



- Mary Smith was a patient when she was young and valued our clinical research approach to care, especially Dr. Mazaheri. She believed in our goal of always providing the very best patient outcomes through research. **The Mary Smith Clinical Research Endowment** has been established by her family to support Clinic research into the future. Our practitioners can attend conferences, publish research, and accomplish other research goals because of her commitment to our patients. Thank you to Mary and her family!
- The **Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, Inc.** has awarded the Clinic a generous grant to support uncompensated patient care costs. Thank you for believing in the futures of our patients!
- The **Josiah W. and Bessie H. Kline Foundation** has awarded the Clinic \$15,000 to purchase a new dental chair. Everyone is excited for the new comfort this chair will provide!
- **Camryn Heister, MS, CCC-SLP, LCPC** Speech-Language Pathologist, has begun a three-year term as one of three Speech-Language Pathology representatives on the American Cleft Palate Craniofacial Association (ACPA) Commission on Approval of Teams. She will review multidisciplinary team approval applications, evaluate teams according to the ACPA Standards for Cleft and Craniofacial Teams, provide constructive feedback to applicant teams, and participate in the team approval process. Congratulations Camryn!



Lancaster Cleft Palate Clinic

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From Surprises to SMILES

SAVE THE DATES **and** SHARE SMILES!

Make-A-Will Month | August

August is Make-A-Will Month! Give yourself peace of mind by making or updating your will. An up-to-date will offers your family protection if the worst happens and can establish your legacy.

Contact your lawyer or work with a free or low-cost automated system to get started. The Clinic can support your process as desired.



October 10

Eat your way through downtown Lititz on October 10 during the Chocolate Walk and support patient care. Proceeds from this event support children-focused charities, including our Clinic!

[Scan the QR code to get your ticket.](#)



ExtraGive | November 20

The Extraordinary Give is November 20 and we hope you will be part of raising critical funds for patient care on this special day of community giving. For 24 hours we can all ensure children with craniofacial differences receive the care they deserve and open additional prizes for patient care. [Mark your calendar!](#)



DAFday

October 8

Do you have a Donor Advised Fund?

DAFday is a national day of giving through Donor Advised Funds. Please consider supporting our patients on this special day through your DAF!

You can also have your DAF gift doubled through halfmydaf.com.



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).