

# Wonder Connection



Empowering hospitalized kids and teens with  
the wonders of nature and science since 2006



# Our Story

Wonder Connection was founded by Katie Stoudemire, who discovered through her work as a college student volunteer that hospitalized children and adolescents experience pain, fear, boredom, and isolation. She began to put herself in their shoes and wondered what she would want if she were a patient. The answer, she found, was a way to engage her mind and connect to nature. Understanding that young patients need a creative outlet and a way to fill their time with fun and productivity, Katie started bringing natural-based activities for them to interact with and was amazed by the positive response she received.

What began as a thoughtful gesture developed into a dream to run a non-profit program where young patients could participate in nature and science programs designed to empower and enrich. In 2006, Wonder Connection was born from a small discretionary grant. Today, Wonder Connection is a team of 4 who continue to serve North Carolina by promoting joy, well-being, and self-confidence in hospitalized children and teens with the help of UNC Hospital partnerships, dedicated volunteers, and generous grants and donations.





# Our Inspiration

We are inspired by the strength, courage and imagination of the kids and teens that we serve. Our program participants are both inpatients and outpatients ranging from the ages of 4 to 18 and come from throughout the state of North Carolina. Their diagnoses include cystic fibrosis, sickle cell anemia, major depression, cancer, burns, Crohn's disease, and traumatic brain injuries, and many have compromised immune systems due to medical conditions and treatment. They are often hospitalized for indefinite periods and may be involved with the Wonder Connection program for anywhere from one hour to over several months.

By exploring nature and science, our patient participants find joy in learning and use their imaginations. Each experience begins with them being able to choose which activity they participate in. We love to watch as patients engage in positive distractions while their confidence and joy blossom. If our programming can have a positive impact on their lives, even for a short while, then we feel that we have done our job.



# Nature & Science Programming

Wonder Connection provides a one-of-a-kind, patient-centered program to pediatric and psychiatric patients that connect them to the natural world via hands-on natural science activities. Our goals are to increase competency in science skills, nurture their enthusiasm and interest, and stimulate positive emotions. Research has shown that when patients are involved in a natural science activity, it helps them cope with the physical and emotional stresses of hospitalization (Jessee, P 1987). The activities also give them an opportunity to express their individuality through creativity.

We believe that giving children a choice to participate in a Wonder Connection activity helps them gain independence through their decision-making. That is why they get to choose what activity to do and how involved they want to be, which is a change from their daily hospital experience.



*We bring Wonder Connection programming to patients through weekly group science classes, one-to-one visits, "to go" science kits, and outpatient activities at the Ronald McDonald House of Chapel Hill.*







"My child was very upset after receiving a painful injection and was crying and I was having trouble consoling him. Katie walked in with a project for him to do and completely made him forget his pain."

– Grateful Wonder Connection Parent

## Supporting Families

From consoling their child, paying medical bills, or simply helping their child eat, parents and caregivers bear various responsibilities--some of which we could never begin to understand. Wonder Connection knows that we cannot change their circumstances but we can try to ease some of the burden by offering a fun, positive and mentally stimulating distraction to parents and their children. Our goal is to help families worry about one less thing and see their child having the opportunity to be a kid, not just a patient.





# Wonder Connection Activities and Topics



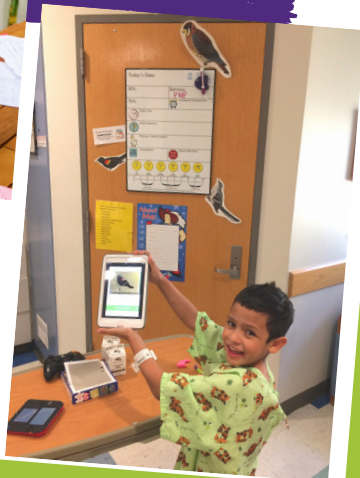
volcanoes



flowers



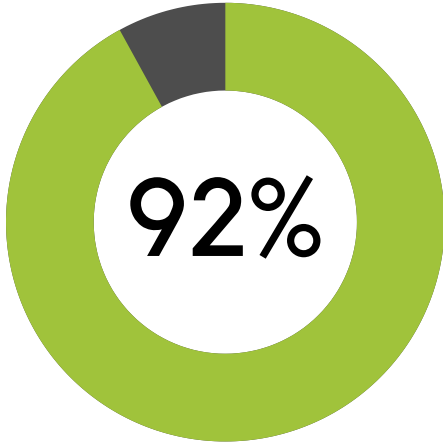
birds



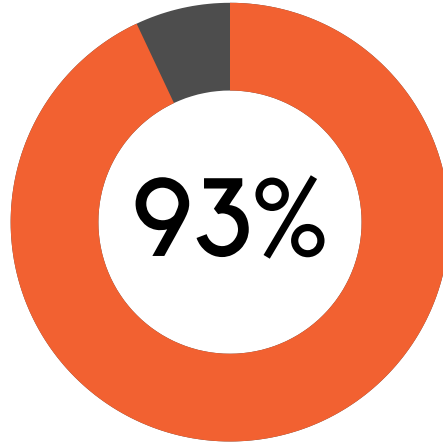
animal skulls



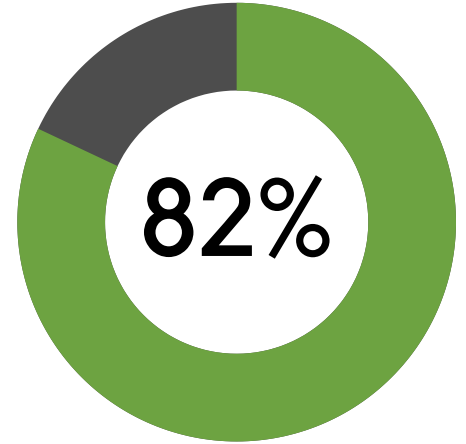
# Surveys



92% of the children said they were interested in each activity.



93% of patients reported feeling happy due to participating in a Wonder Connection activity.



82% of the children said they learned something new during the virtual session.



*"Teamwork, strategic thinking, and empathy - these are just a few of the skills our teens are learning from flower arranging."*

– Kinsey, Recreation Therapist

*"...today Sam is smiling and interested in eating for the first time in many days, completely attributed to the volcano experiment!"*

– Wonder Connection Grandparent

# Improving Patient Experiences



We are always thinking about our patients and how we can serve them better. Thanks to grants and donations, we have created innovative ways to help patients interact with nature and science.

In 2016, Wonder Connection was the winner of the Core77 Social Impact Design Award for inventing the WonderSphere. Along with the Bresslergroup, we created a sealed chamber with built-in gloves that enable hospitalized children & teens to reach inside plants, dig, water, and touch nature without danger of infection.

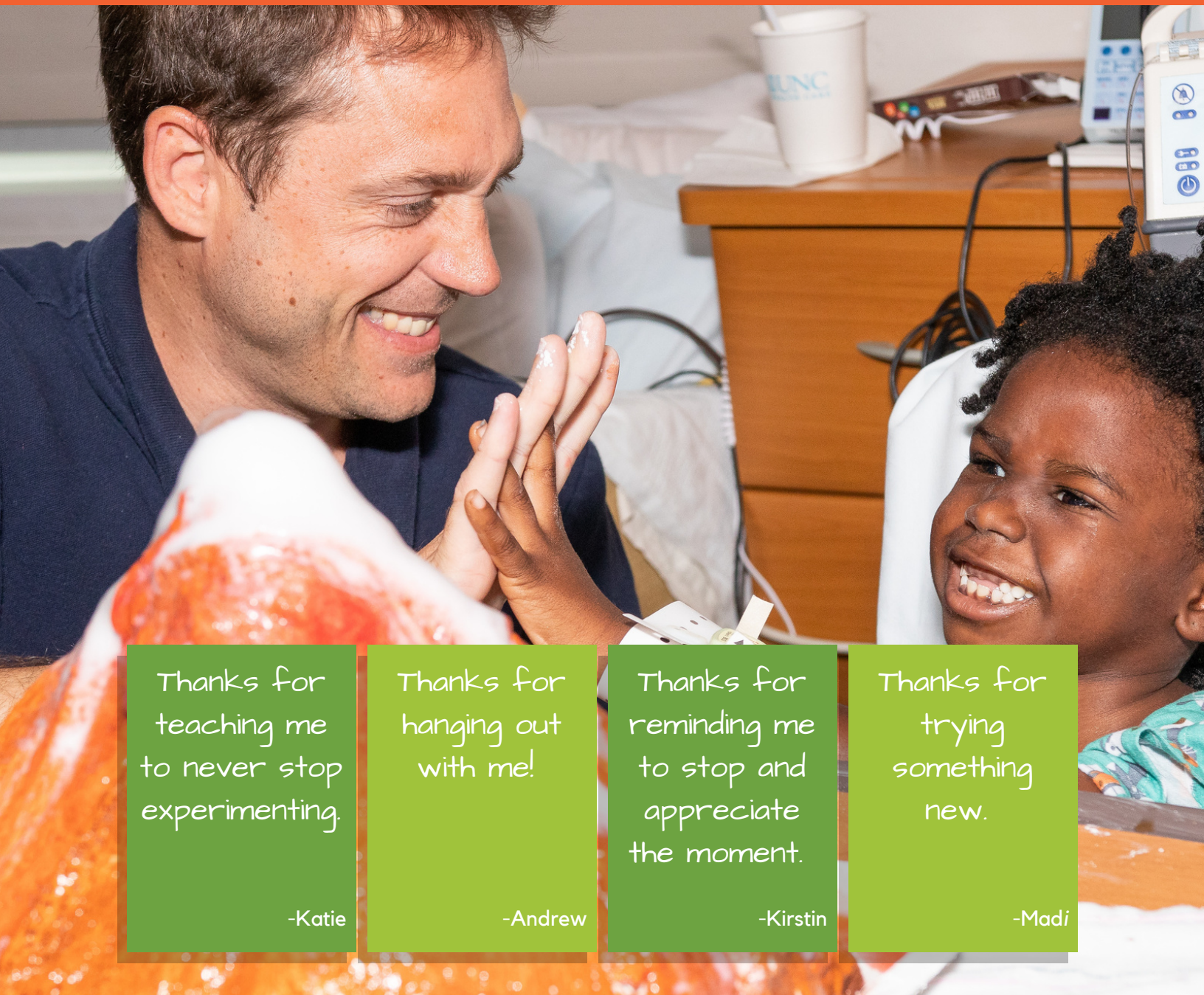
## WonderSphere





# Staff Gratitude

The patients and volunteers we interact with on a daily basis continue to inspire and motivate us as staff. We look forward to learning from them each and every day.



Thanks for teaching me to never stop experimenting.

-Katie

Thanks for hanging out with me!

-Andrew

Thanks for reminding me to stop and appreciate the moment.

-Kirstin

Thanks for trying something new.

-Madi

# Our Valued Partners

We are thankful for the incredible relationships we have made over the years. We could not do what we do without our valued partners.

- UNC Children's Hospital
- NC Neurosciences Hospital
- NC Children's Specialty Clinic
- Ronald McDonald House of Chapel Hill
- Fernrock Farm
- NC Museum of Natural Sciences
- Chapel Hill Garden Club
- Wonder Connection Advisory Board



# Volunteers



Wonder Connection has had the pleasure of working with individuals from retired teachers to scientists and college students, who have dedicated their time to help fulfill our mission of bringing joy to pediatric patients through nature and science activities. After undergoing a training process, adults are eligible to volunteer at UNC Hospitals. Our volunteers also give their time at outpatient events and as office administrators. We are always accepting new applications from those who share a love and knowledge of science!







Wonder Connection is 100% grant and donation funded. Donate online at:  
<https://www.wonderconnection.org/>

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