



Med students aim to decrease fear of the white coat

Description

Teddy Bear Hospital is an initiative by students from McGill's Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences

By Irwin Rapoport

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The Teddy Bear Hospital is an initiative developed and led by students from **McGill University's Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences** which aims to help alleviate some of the fears young children may experience on medical visits. The hospital set up shop at École primaire des Amis-du-Monde on November 28 last year and had more than 150 visitors that day.



The elementary school, located at 8205 Mackle Road (west of

Westminster Avenue and east of Cavendish Blvd.), will host the hospital between 9 am and 5 pm. Children between the ages of four and seven will be able to bring their favourite stuffed friends to the surgery.

“As part of the initiative, McGill students visit elementary schools and summer camps in Montreal,” stated a message from **Alejandra Martinez** and **Bertrand Leduc**, co-presidents of the McGill Faculty of Medicine Alumni Association. “Participating children are invited to bring a stuffed animal that accompanies them as they make their way through a circuit of eight stations staffed by students from nursing, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, kinesiology, nutrition and medicine. At each station, the children participate in the treatment of their ‘teddy bears’ to better familiarize themselves with the health care environment.”

“The goal is to encourage children to have a more comfortable relationship with the clinical environment and encourage healthy habits as well as promoting interdisciplinarity amongst students in health care professions,” they added. “Since our first event on June 3, 2022, over 300 children have participated in our events.”

X-rays don't lie. Kangoo has a broken arm. But Kangoo is lucky because he can now go to the Teddy Bear Hospital, where all teddy bears are treated for free – no health insurance required!

“I discovered the Teddy Bear Hospital concept through a friend studying medicine at Université Laval. She had attended the first event of its kind in Quebec in 2019,” says Alejandra Martinez, co-president of the Teddy Bear Hospital Club led by McGill medical students.

The Teddy Bear Hospital project is the brainchild of the **International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA)**



medicine in 2019, Martinez knew she wanted to participate in this

“The goal is to get children to overcome their fear of hospitals

and anxiety about illness,” says Bertrand Leduc, the initiative’s co-president, who wanted to get this project started at McGill University. He is also finishing his third year in the MDCM program and plans on specializing in pediatrics.

“I don’t want to miss it,” says **Dr. Mylène Dandavino** (BSc’99, MSc’02, MDCM’99, PGME’04), a general pediatrician at the Montreal Children’s Hospital and associate professor at McGill University who acts as the supervisor for the group. “This is the sort of project that reminds us why we went into medicine in the first place.”

The first event took place at St. Gabriel Elementary School in Pointe St. Charles, with the school gym converted into a hospital.

Here are some highlights from a Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences Alumni Friends [article](#), written by Jean-Benoît Nadeau, that describes what children will experience:

When children arrive, they are given a map of eight stations to visit – Triage, Medical Imaging, Surgery, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Healthy Living, and a Rest Area. They can mark each station with a sticker after they visit it. On the front of the document, they can fill in their teddy bear’s medical information. At Triage, children listen to heartbeats, check vital signs, weigh their ‘patients’ and examine their ears. “This is the most familiar step, the one that almost all children will have experienced,” says **Lianna Carusone**.

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place.'

McGill Teddy Bear Hospital

ng. Here, Teddy gets an X-ray to see what's wrong – it's usually surgery, kids get to operate on a large teddy bear with a zipper onto a poster that identifies them.



At the Pharmacy, children have to choose different ingredients

to mix Teddy's 'medicine.'

"Many stations have one or more messages," explains Martinez. "In the pharmacy, it's, "Don't take medicine that's not for you." In physical and occupational therapy, where they learn about neurodiversity and see different devices such as orthotics, the message is "Anyone can be your friend even if they are having trouble walking."

The Healthy Living station is an opportunity to teach kids safety and nutrition lessons such as putting on a life jacket when you are on the water, wearing a helmet on your bike, and applying sunscreen when you're in the sun. "The way to get this across is to say, 'When Teddy is in this situation, what do you do?'" explains Leduc.

The little ones then go to the Rest station, where they watch videos about health. All medical faculties in Quebec have their own Teddy Bear Hospital project and collaborate to produce audiovisual material. The McGill students' video deals specifically with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders.

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Westmount Magazine spoke with Alejandra Martinez, 4th-year medical student at McGill University, co-President and co-founder of the Teddy Bear Hospital initiative, and **Morgan MacDonald**, Med 3 representative at McGill University.

WM: What led to creating this wonderful program, and what are the goals?



...ill chapter of an IFMSA (International Federation of Medical
...d that such an event was lacking in Montreal, we decided to
...project and the difference it can make to many children afraid of

WM: What are the benefits for med students and children?

MacDonald: Our project's mission is to create a positive first contact with the healthcare system to decrease fear of the 'white coat.' Our events consist of multiple stations where the child's teddy bear will experience common situations they may encounter at a hospital visit and interact with various students in different healthcare professions. Besides, our stations promote healthy lifestyle habits such as a balanced diet and physical activity. We aim to reach out to schools of low socioeconomic status to have the greatest impact on our population. For volunteers, this is an opportunity to experience interdisciplinarity, a key concept in our current healthcare system.

WM: How do the kids react going through the various stations? What are some of the things they say and some of the questions they ask?



Martinez: All of the kids are quite excited to come to the event with their teddy bears. Many volunteer information if they have been in hospital before or know someone who has worked in a healthcare field. We measured the impact of our event by asking them to colour the face that best represents their emotion regarding hospital encounters. We were happy to notice the positive impact of our student initiative on their perspective of the doctor's encounter.

WM: *Can people volunteer to help with the program and events?*

MacDonald: Each station is led by students from several health fields such as Nursing, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Kinesiology, Nutrition and Medicine. Therefore, we are always looking for volunteers from different healthcare professions to help animate our events.

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People can make donations to support this initiative by visiting alumni.mcgill.ca/give

Images: courtesy of the McGill Teddy Bear Hospital

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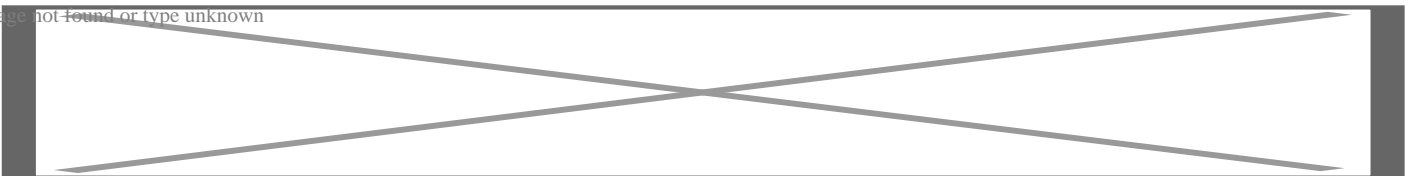


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