



Winter Ghostkeeper, CCLS

BACHELORS IN COMMUNICATIONS/ POST-GRADUATE DIPLOMA IN CHILD LIFE
4 YEARS EXPERIENCE

“Fitting in is boring for anyone who wants to be extraordinary”-Adam Levine

Can you tell me a little bit about your hospital and the units you cover?

I work as both a hospital and community child life specialist. In the hospital I work casually and can cover many different areas, but I tend to work the most in the emergency department. The hospital is a free-standing children's hospital that sees about 180-200 children a day in the ED. A fun fact about our hospital is that it was designed with the input of our children! People like to refer to the hospital as the Lego building on the hill! In my community role – I work for a pediatric cancer charity. My title here is Outreach Coordinator and Child Life Specialist. There are three parts to my job – I coordinate programs for our families, oversee our day camp during the summer and am our one-person child life program! The child life programs that I do are – Cancer in the Classroom – where I go into classrooms of kids returning to school after a cancer diagnosis and teach their class a little about what cancer is and what their classmate has been going through. I also do one-on-one sessions, coping sessions, and group programs. Our foundation serves more than 600 Albertan families per year.

What's your typical unit census and about how many patients do you see per day?

When I'm at the hospital I see anywhere from 10-15 patients per 8-hour shift. Most of those kiddos are coming into our emergency department – so I see anything from kids needing toys, to distracting a toddler during an IV start to helping a child cope in the trauma room! In the community I usually do 1-2 Cancer in the Classroom's per month and have 1-2 one-on-one sessions per week.

What does your average day look like?

Every day looks completely different and that is what I LOVE about my job(s)!! So, let me describe a day where I just happen to be working both jobs! I come to my community job for the typical 8am-4pm day. During the day I might be working on planning a program for our families – like a ski day or a special evening for our bereaved families and also emailing with a teacher to coordinate a day for me to come into their class to deliver Cancer in the Classroom. I may also be preparing for a one-on-one session that I have in the afternoon with a little kiddo that I am working with for troubles coping with their monthly bloodwork. When 4pm hits I am off driving across the city to get to the hospital by 5pm to cover a shift in the emergency department! When I get to the hospital – I never quite know what the evening will look like, but I am rarely found sitting at my desk! I am usually checking in with nurses and doctors for referrals, prepping kids for procedures, or following cries!

What is your favorite distraction item and how do you use it?

I used to use my iPad a lot but lately I have been going back to the art of conversation! I use my language and voice to be the calming presence in the room. I ensure that I am using non-threatening language in hopes of not only distracting and calming the child but also modeling it for others in the room. I do a lot of breathing coaching, counting and getting kids to focus on wiggling their toes or nose or ears during a potentially painful procedure. I still do keep a tube of bubbles in my pocket and have my iPad close!

What's the best part about your job?

I love when a kid says, “that wasn't as bad as I thought it would be,” or “I didn't even feel it!” Helping a child realize that they CAN do it.

What's the hardest part in doing your job?

Not being able to help everyone that comes in to the ED while I'm on shift and a child passing away from cancer that I have worked with.

What's a facet of your job that people wouldn't expect?

How much child life specialists have to advocate for their role within the healthcare team. I am always educating other members of the healthcare team what child life specialists do and how we can help the child and their family!

What's something you wish you knew when you started on this unit?

I think I might have known this but didn't believe it – “Be confident! You are an important part of the healthcare team and you are there for the patients and their families. You have every right to be in the room to support this child through this time!!”

Do you have anything else you'd like to share about your job, tips for students, or thoughts?

If you feel passionate about this career then find a way to do it! Be open to new experiences. Your career might not look exactly like you thought it would but those experiences will only make you a better child life specialist! Also be patient – good things come to those who wait! I hoped that I would have a full-time position at the hospital in my hometown by now – but that opportunity hasn't come my way (yay unions!) but I have had other amazing opportunities in the meantime that have made me a better person, advocate and in turn a better child life specialist.

