

PRINT-Kids get fired up about STEAM at OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois

Nine year-old Ellie Schwab of Glasford has been in the hospital three times in less than a month. In early October she endured an eighth surgery in her short lifetime because she was born with spina bifida, a condition which leaves the spinal cord partially exposed, leading to nerve damage and infections. Her mom Stacie says it's been hard, but she's inspired by her daughter's spirit and the encouragement she finds at OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois.

"It's amazing. OSF has truly been a blessing for us and for Ellie."

On National STEAM Day this week, engineers from [Jump Trading Simulation & Education Center](#) visited patients and shared an activity in which they mixed liquids to chemically react and poured it into molds to make a small pediatric heart. It's just one of many activities that engage kids in Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math while at OSF Children's Hospital.

Sister M. Pieta Keller, an engineer who has been at Jump for more than five years, led the activity with Ellie.

"Right now these two liquids are interacting and it's gonna change color on us in a little bit of time. It's actually producing heat," she explains as she leads Ellie to feel the bottom of the mold. "Feel the bottom of the cup. Feel that? That feels warm."

Ellie admits she's not a big fan of science. What she connects to is an activity she is allowed to do every day starting at 9 a.m. – art.

"I like to paint. I like to draw, color; pretty much anything that involves art I like to do," she shares.

Ellie has enjoyed making slime and decorating a turkey with a feather on which she drew with a message of appreciation for her child life specialist – one of several teachers who make sure the Illini Bluffs third grader is keeping up with lessons from her school.

"It's amazing. It helps her learn and it keeps her mind off of all the medical things she needs to help her grow," says Stacie Schwab.

OSF provides a wide range of ways to keep hospitalized kids learning, including providing an activity book that uses augmented reality programs and teachers such as Becky Dailey who interact regularly with children to provide ongoing enrichment and to coordinate lessons and homework with their local school.

Ellie's mom Stacie says the education and activities help her daughter feel as though she's not missing out.

"As she's grown older and had to be in the hospital, they always have someone come in and make sure she has some kind of activity she could do and there's a huge playroom down the hall that she absolutely loves."

Sister Pieta says engaging kids in activities that cover Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math hopefully sparks an interest in one of the areas related to medicine.

"We want them to be able to find out where they can best serve the Lord and the world and where they're called to and whether that's in health care – whether as a doctor or nurse or as a lab tech or over with us in Innovation, whatever that may be, whether that's clinical or non-clinical, a lot of times they find their place in health care."

OSF Innovation also marked National STEAM Day [by launching the first of 12 Anatomy Academy augmented reality lessons](#) that are available for free for anyone on [the OSF STEAM website](#).