

Go Baby Go Gets Kids moving – and Learning

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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Children learn by exploring their environment. Research shows independent mobility is linked to developing cognitive, social, motor, language and other lifelong skills. Children with limited mobility – such as those born with spina bifida or cerebral palsy - sometimes lag behind in these developmental opportunities. That's where Go Baby Go comes in.

"Go Baby Go is a project that was started to help kids to move and explore their environment. So kids with disabilities aren't always able to move and explore the way we would hope for them to and this is a way to get them moving," explains Dr. Sue Caldecott-Johnson, a Pediatric Rehabilitation specialist with OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois.

Go Baby Go is a national, community-based research, design and outreach program that provides modified ride-on cars to children with limited mobility. Volunteers adapt the motorized cars, which can include adding hand controls, extra support for a child to enable them to sit safely in the car, and even giving their parents a remote control to help them steer.

"A lot of times the work we do here we get to see in a clinic, sometimes we don't. So here's a beautiful way for me to see that direct impact we're having on our patients and on their lives and their family. And just to know that they're going to have a ton of fun when they weren't able to do this before because mom and dad don't know how to rewire these cars! It takes a few engineers and a great team to put them all together," said Sister M. Pieta Keller, Innovation Engineer with Jump Simulation.

Volunteers from Jump Simulation, OSF Children's Hospital of Illinois, the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria, and students from local high school robotics clubs, came together and learned how Go Baby Go shows that engineering is simply solving problems, in this case, for some of those who need it most.

"It's different because you're pulling together people from all different kinds. There's a few of us here from Jump, but we've got people from the medical school that are here, we've got engineers from Cat, we've got high school kids and everyone in between. So it's getting all those people to work together and then realize okay, this team had this problem, this team's got another one, so how do we how do we figure this out and get it taken care of now not tomorrow," said Sister Pieta.

As a pediatric rehabilitation specialist, Dr. Sue Caldecott-Johnson says it does her heart good – and it reminds her why she went into this branch of medicine in the first place – when she sees the excitement on a child's face when they have a new way to explore their world.

"The families usually have stories about how much more independent their child has become, how much more they're socializing. Because when a kid goes out in the neighborhood and is driving a car everybody wants to come see them and meet them whereas when they were out with their walker or perhaps in a wheelchair it's more often the other children are intimidated, so this lets them become the center of attention in a very positive way," added Dr. Caldecott-Johnson.

To learn more about volunteer opportunities or the special fund set-up for those who would like to donate to a car for a child, contact the OSF HealthCare Foundation at (309) 566-5666.