

Best Buds

"Having somebody to hang out with helps them through their hospitalization"



We were in the playroom. I brought my video game, and Skylar asked if he could play, and I said 'yes,'" says 8-year-old Dakota Carlyle. "We started playing the Xbox and started talking," adds Skylar Weber, 12.

Dakota is exuberant and outgoing. Skylar has a warm smile but is typically quiet and reserved. But that game started

another lasting friendship on the fourth floor of SSM Cardinal Glennon Children's Medical Center.

Dakota and Skylar visited the Bob Costas Cancer Center throughout last winter for leukemia treatments. Both were hospitalized for weeks at a time on the medical center's fourth floor, the usual home for children and teens undergoing treatments for cancer.

"On the fourth floor, the kids stick together," says Skylar's mother, Na'Cole Weber. "They have a disease in common. They play together when they can. There are days when they are too sick or weak or have a headache, but they all understand that. They come by and check on each other. Even when they are just in the Costas Center for checkups, they come up to the fourth floor to see the kids who are in the hospital. That is important for them," she continues.

Having friends in the hospital makes stays comfortable for Dakota, says his mother, Nicole Barr. "It helps to know somebody is going through this with you. It's reassuring to know there is somebody to play with when you have

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to stay in the hospital. Dakota loves everybody and talks to everybody. If he doesn't know a patient, he'll be knocking on their door and playing with them."

Dakota is undergoing his second round of treatments for acute lymphoblastic leukemia. He was first diagnosed with the disease when he was 18 months old. "We found out in August 2010 that it had come back," his mother says. "We are here every Friday, and every couple of weeks he is here during the weekend, sometimes longer."

Dakota Carlyle, 8, and Skylar Weber, 12, launched a lasting friendship around the Xbox video game while undergoing leukemia treatments.

Skylar was diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia in November 2010. Throughout the next seven months he was hospitalized for stretches of two to three weeks. He received his last chemotherapy treatment in May and

continues to visit Cardinal Glennon Children's Medical Center for regular examinations.

"It was difficult at first, but it eased my mind to know other people who were going through the same thing," says his mother. "I was able to comfort other parents and let them know that you just have to trust and believe that it is going to be OK."

Bonds formed between patients and families during cancer treatments are a "tremendous benefit," says David Ish,



Moms Nicole Barr, left, and Na'Cole Weber also became friends during the months they spent with their sons receiving treatment.

child life specialist at Cardinal Glennon Children's Medical Center. "It gives the patients and families extra support. The staff is a huge support for the families, too, but we don't know what it is really like to experience cancer."

Last winter produced a large number of friendships, Ish says. "Dakota and Skylar are really tight friends, but that is not unusual. A group of kids were diagnosed around the same time and became really close. It was fun to see that happening, and it was beneficial to them. Just having somebody to hang out with helps them through their hospitalization."

"It's good to have friends here because it keeps you busy," Dakota says. "When Skylar was sick, I would come over to his room to see how he was doing. If my friends aren't here, I play with the nurses. I drive them bananas, and that's fun."

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Dakota will be continuing treatments for his leukemia for more than a year. The treatments sometimes leave him feeling poorly, but most of the time he feels OK, says mother Nicole. "He likes staying here. He doesn't want to come home." 🌿

Dakota

