



INTRODUCING OUR 2020-2021 NATIONAL PATIENT AMBASSADORS:

THE STORIES OF CONNOR AND MIA

Every year, Shriners Hospitals for Children® selects two National Patient Ambassadors to represent the health care system's patients. The ambassadors spend the year sharing their stories of perseverance in the face of adversity and the ways Shriners Hospitals for Children has made a dramatic difference in their lives. Introducing our two new Ambassadors:

CONNOR

Connor, 14, was born with a bilateral incomplete cleft lip and complete cleft palate involving the hard and soft palate. As a newborn, his condition was so severe that he was even unable to create the suction needed to feed. By the time he was 3 weeks old, he was failing to gain weight and was about to be admitted to a hospital. That's when Connor's family learned about Shriners Hospitals for Children — Chicago.

There, his RN care coordinator gave his mother, Kelly, a special syringe, making it possible for her to finally feed her baby. And from that moment, Connor began an extensive treatment plan of surgeries and interventions that extends until he is 21, so that some repairs can be made after he has stopped growing.

Connor's condition affects not only his teeth and his ability to eat, but also his speech, hearing, and social and emotional well-being. In addition, Connor has a connective tissue disorder that eventually made it difficult for the active teen to participate in contact sports.

Still, Connor's can-do spirit and supportive family have helped him to find many ways to pursue his passions. Connor umpires for youth baseball, acts as a physical education mentor for other kids with disabilities at his school, and is an advocate and community volunteer. But most of all, Connor is a golfer. He maintains a busy training schedule and hopes to one day become a pro. And with his family, Connor is part of a large local annual fundraiser, a golf tournament that has over the years raised more than \$200,000 for Shriners Hospitals for Children.

"I just want to use my time as a National Patient Ambassador to help other kids," Connor said. "I want kids to know that no matter what they look like, or how they walk, or what makes them different – that they shouldn't let anyone else make them feel bad. I want to help other kids feel good about themselves and their differences. I'm excited to make an impact on other Shriners kids' lives and spread awareness about our amazing hospitals and Shriners."

MIA

Mia, 16, was born with a severe case of infantile idiopathic scoliosis. Her journey with Shriners Hospitals for Children began when she was 2, when she was first seen at the St. Louis location. Mia's treatments have included halo traction to gradually straighten and stretch her spine, as well as nearly 20 surgeries.

During her extensive time in the hospital, Mia and her care team developed a tight bond, and Mia considers the people she knows at Shriners Hospitals – her doctors, nurses, therapists, and even the security guard – family. She has served as a patient ambassador for Shriners Hospitals for Children — St. Louis since she was 4 and has spoken to numerous audiences on behalf of the hospital. She has also appeared in promotional videos and media interviews. Mia's passion is theater and singing, and she was featured singing *I'll Be Home for Christmas* in our holiday commercials. Mia is also part of the Shriners children's choir that performed in a recent recording of Foreigner's hit song *I Want to Know What Love Is*.

"I am so honored to be in this position," Mia said. "For as long as I can remember, I have always loved Shriners Hospitals. Not just because of the life it has given me, but the real love that comes from it. This community consists of the best people, and it truly makes my heart soar to know I'm a large part of it. It makes me proud to know that I will be giving back to a hospital that not only gave me a normal life but is a second home for myself and my family."

We congratulate Connor and Mia, and thank them for their willingness to represent Shriners Hospitals for Children and share their stories.

To learn more about Shriners Hospitals for Children, please visit shrinershospitalsforchildren.org.



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