

PANDA's Puzzle Piece

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People Acting Now Discover Answers—an Arizona-based organization that supports treatment for childhood diseases—aspires to raise \$1 million in two years to build a comprehensive Children's Neurological Center at the Arizona Health Sciences Center Campus in Tucson. For one of PANDA's co-founders, this center touches close to home.



THE PHOENIX WOMEN'S BOARD of the Steele Children's Research Center created PANDA in 1999. Since 2000, more than \$2 million has been raised through its annual "Children Helping Children" fashion show and golf tournament in Phoenix, with all of the proceeds benefitting the Steele Children's Research Center at the University of Arizona in Tucson. "We founded PANDA to bring awareness of the Steele Children's Research Center to the whole state," says Robyn DeBell, co-founder of PANDA. "We feel that this touches everybody in some way or another."

This year, the fashion show and tournament proceeds (the fashion show took place at the Arizona Biltmore on April 25) will go toward building the PANDA Children's Neurological Center. Once complete, this state-of-the-art Tucson-based Center will staff neurologists, behavior pediatricians, therapists and specialists—all working together to deliver a complete treatment plan for children suffering from neurological conditions. The conditions that will be treated include traumatic brain injury, stroke and autism, among others. Unlike any other hospital today, this is the only place where a child with a brain injury will be able to receive a complete diagnoses and treatment plan. "It is such a relief to the parent because you are just grasping at straws [when your child is sick]," says Penny Gunning, co-founder of PANDA. "You get information here and there, but no one puts it together for [the families]. These doctors will all be communicating together."

Gunning knows a thing or two about finding proper treatment. Her 7-year-old grandson, Brady, had three intrauterine strokes before he was born. "Until we were personally affected, we didn't realize there was no [single] place to go [where] you could get all the doctors working together," Gunning says, referring to their multiple doctor visits at various hospitals throughout the country. "We had the puzzle pieces but we didn't have anyone to put them all together." She says that the lack of resources in just one place is frustrating and exhausting for the child as well as the family. "Anytime you can save time and save money and affect the family less by [providing a full treatment plan], it's huge," she says.

For Dr. Faye Ghishan, director of Steele Children's Research Center, the funding of the new PANDA Children's Neurological Center is a dream come true. "We are going to bring in a number of individuals with various expertise to deliver the best care for the kids," says Ghishan, who has published more than 200 scientific papers in his 42 years of experience. "However, this will also be a training vehicle for the future pediatrician to recognize brain injury and [learn] how we deal with it." The goal is to teach medical students to become pediatricians and train Ph.D. graduate students to become scientists in order to "advance science and advance medical knowledge by doing research," Ghishan says.

For families in Phoenix and Tucson and all over the country, PANDA's efforts to build the new facility are not taken lightly. To have a haven for both research and treatment will ease the suffering of families and children and provide answers to the puzzles, all in one incredible building.

PANDA

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