

## Group lends OC homes so sick kids can have fun

By Brian Shane • Staff Writer • December 21, 2008

OCEAN CITY -- Gabriel Miller doesn't look like a sick kid. He likes to run everywhere he goes. He has brown hair that runs halfway down his back and is often mistaken for a girl. For an only child, he's playful and engaging -- funny, even, as he zips around a room, under the watchful eye of his mother, Meghan Miller.

But his growth spurt only came after his doctors finally took him off the steroids that were keeping his immune system from attacking his nervous system, and had been inhibiting his bone growth. Because while Gabe doesn't look like a sick kid, he is.

When Gabe first got sick, Meghan heard from another parent about a place at the beach where you can just go and relax, away from the doctors, the radiation, the chemo. Something not just for the patient, but the whole family. Meghan's social worker made the arrangements, and soon the Millers were approved to join the Believe In Tomorrow Children's Foundation.

Founded in Ocean City in 1986, the Baltimore-based charity has provided nearly 500,000 overnight accommodations in respite and hospital housing programs for more than 100,000 families.

Gabe's been sick most of his life. A month before his second birthday, doctors removed a cancerous tumor, a neuroblastoma, from his left adrenal gland -- and he will proudly show you the surgical scar that runs across his belly.

Meghan and Gabe, joined sometimes by Meghan's parents, visit the Believe In Tomorrow Children's House By The Sea in Ocean City three to four times a year for a week at a time.

"It's not just for him, it's for the whole family," she said. "They're just amazing. It gives you a chance to breathe. They help me make really good memories in the midst of all the horrible ones."

Brian Morrison, founder and CEO of Believe In Tomorrow, said the program in Ocean City is the birthplace of the concept of respite housing, where patients can decompress on a regular basis during their treatment, and the chance to look forward to something.

"We deal with children and families that oftentimes are not forward-looking," said Morrison, 54. "They are looking at today's treatment and yesterday's treatment. They might be thinking about tomorrow's treatment. But if they have something they can look forward to that's very positive, that kind of plants the seed to a very important part of the healing process, which is believing in and focusing on the future."

[bshane@dmg.gannett.com](mailto:bshane@dmg.gannett.com)

410-213-9442, ext. 14