

Teddy Bear Fair un-bear-ably educational, says organizer

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SAINT JOHN • Rosie, a green plush bear, recently fell down the stairs.

She took a bit of a hit, but it's OK now, said Jasonna Reddick, 5, standing outside the doors at Saint John Regional Hospital.

"She got hurt but they fixed her all up, and it was fun going with her in the ambulance," she said, holding the cast on her teddy bears' right arm.

From far and wide, sick and hurt stuffed animals and dolls made their way to Saint John Regional Hospital Saturday for the 24th annual Irving Oil Teddy Bear Fair.

The event is so long-standing in the community because it's un-bear-ably educational, said spokeswoman Christine Gilliland.

"Their teddy bear can experience all the (procedures) before the child experiences it in real life," said Gilliland.

More than 2,000 families visited stations throughout the hospital geared to giving teddy bears and dolls their annual check-up.

Wearing a white overcoat and gloves, Julie Carroll, medical laboratory technologist in the la-bear-atory, shows Melania Ryazanov, 5, how to draw blood from her pink plush kitten.

"There's no needle in the end and we have these (different coloured) tubes of 'blood,'" Carroll whispered.

"Now we just draw blood from your teddy to see if they need any special medicines or if they're healthy. It's just a pinch, count to three," she said as her voice escalated.

"Golden star blood. Wow, neat," said Carroll as she showed a tube filled with star sprinkles.

Standing outside the la-bear-atory, Maddie Burge, 11, holds her already-checked teddy bear Sully.

"They took green blood out of him," she said.

"I think they explained it more than my science teacher. They actually talked about finding the vein and everything."

Meanwhile, in the cafeteria enjoying a teddy bear picnic was Dan DeBow and his toddler twins.

"They both recently got needles back home and were petrified," he said, wide-eyed.

"To mention doctor, or dentist now



Jordan Brothers, 3, looks at an X-ray of a stuffed dinosaur during the Teddy Bear Fair at Saint John Regional Hospital Saturday.

PHOTO: REBECCA WATSON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



Julie Carroll, medical laboratory technologist, shows one-and-a-half year old Olivia Isenor how blood is taken from her stuffed bear during the Teddy Bear Fair at Saint John Regional Hospital Saturday.

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even, it hasn't gone over well. But today they were totally into it. It's made one extreme to the other in their perspective of things, so it's great."

The entire day is a continuation of the Irving Oil Fuel the Care program which gives gift cards to parents to take their children to medical treatments, Irving Oil spokeswoman Lisa Savidant said.

"It means a lot for us to be able to give back to the community who supports us," she said, adding many employees volunteer for the fair.

The fair has grown over the years, said parent Katie Mitchell.

"My dad was the former CEO of the hospital's foundation and he helped organize the fair," she said, adding it's always helped kids understand the hospital isn't a scary place.

"But it's definitely grown. It's great to see new faces because kids come here and feel better once they leave."

Money raised this year will help with a neonatal transporter unit which costs \$145,000, so young babies needing to be transferred to another hospital can be, said Gilliland.

"But it's less about the fundraising and more about community awareness and support," she said.

That came in the form of a cast brace for eight-year-old Hannah Hannan and her teddy Sully.

"It's like paper mache so it keeps it hard, and it was really cool getting his X-ray. I actually learned a lot," she said.



Kiana Adams, 9, pets Bentley, a Saint John Ambulance therapy dog, during the Teddy Bear Fair at Saint John Regional Hospital Saturday.

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