

If you were to ask our team what words came to mind when describing Dana, you would get a list like this: dedicated, compassionate, selfless, silly, adventurous, non-judgmental, open-minded. She was a one-of-a-kind person and a one-of-a-kind child life specialist. Dana saw everyone as someone to love and give the best of herself to. She followed her heart and took risks, accepting all of the adventures life threw her way with open arms and the biggest smile on her face.

For 3 ½ years I was one of the lucky ones who was able to work alongside Dana in the pediatric Emergency Department at Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida. Within those walls of the hospital, I was able to see her blossom as a child life specialist, showing an unparalleled kindness to every patient, family and co-worker as she had the ability to love others during their hardest times.

During her time at Golisano, Dana challenged me to grow personally and professionally and to be the best version of myself. She helped me find my voice as an advocate for our patients and families, so as to make their hospital experience a more positive one. We collaborated with our nurses to create POP IT™, a pain management program for our patients that is now a hospital-wide policy and a trademarked program in the US. She was the queen of getting outside her comfort zone, challenging me and the rest of our team to do the same. Together we co-authored an ACLP Bulletin Focus article, presented at the annual conference for Association of Child Life Professionals, Florida Association of Child Life Professionals, and the Emergency Nurses Association. Her adventurous spirit, love of life, and passion for the field of child life were contagious- our interns succeeded, my own self-confidence and creative skillset grew, and the collaborations with our ER and child life team thrived with the addition of her goofy costumes, unique interventions, child life raps and songs, and so many fun activities.

In 2019 Dana again chose to follow her heart, leaving Golisano and headed off to Louisiana, where she continued to be a trailblazer in the child life world. Dana was never one to sit back and wait, she took life by the horns and was constantly searching for ways to grow in her professional practice, never limiting herself to one location. She spent a week in the Bahamas after Hurricane Dorian with the Child Life Disaster Relief team. She remained a mentor through ACLP, spoke on the Child Life On-Call Podcast and wrote numerous blog posts on child life to help further the awareness and respect of our practice. She created her own private practice, taking child life into 10 elementary schools and 1 middle school in Bossier City, LA where she provided interventions to meet the needs of kids dealing with the trauma of COVID, the death of loved ones, as well as those who struggled with chronic illness and pain while in school. Most recently she spent time in Cape Town, South Africa where she was selected to teach and mentor child life practicum students through Connect-123.

But no matter where she was in the world, to know Dana was to know that you were never alone in this life. Through her child life work within the hospital walls or her many extra-curricular child life activities she made a difference in the lives of every single person she encountered. Whether she was working with a patient, an intern, or a fellow child life specialist, she was always there, inspiring us to put in the effort, believe in ourselves, and to never give up, no matter what we were faced with. She believed in the importance of overcoming obstacles, lifting each other up, and seizing every moment we're given. She was the epitome of living life to the fullest, loving hard and laughing often.

People talk about chasing dreams, people talk about making a difference in someone else's life, and people talk about living life to the fullest, but Dana didn't just talk about it, she did it. In a way too short amount of time, she had an incredible impact on the child life community all around the world, and that is something her family and friends want to continue to live on through this student scholarship.

To the future and current child life students, our greatest hope is that you not only learn from Dana's work as a child life specialist, but you apply it to your lives. Put in the work, never give up, remain compassionate and open to whatever you face on your child life journey. Our field needs more specialists like Dana, and we are so excited to see who is going to step up and carry on her legacy.

And to our Dana, thank you. For everything you taught me, our child life team at Golisano, your students, and the entire child life community. We love you and miss you dearly. The lights of the world are a little dimmer without you, but your smile, your laugh, and your zest for life will be carried on in each of us. You will never be forgotten.