

Smiles at Sick Kids

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Toronto Sun

MANUEL HEDERICH and Brett Davey know more grown-up terms than most boys their age — words like cancer, chemotherapy and neurological disorders.

But a couple of days a week at the Hospital for Sick Children, the boys, aged 8 and 7, can simply be kids again.

Every Tuesday and Thursday, six clowns — complete with tricycles, painted faces, colourful clothes, oversized shoes and bags of toys — visit patients like Hederich and Davey to coax smiles, encourage play and blow a bubble or two.

'Loves the hospital'

"They look forward to them. They know when it's Tuesday and Thursday," said Michelle Sova, whose son, Davey, is being treated for Alexander disease, a rare neurological disorder. "It lets them forget about being sick for awhile."

The clowns brighten the hospital experience for Hederich, now undergoing treatment for a brain tumour following previous spinal surgeries.

"Manuel loves the hospital.

Hospital sends in the clowns

He wants to be a doctor," said his mom, Marcela Uribe. "He's always talking about the hospital and his next operation."

The therapeutic clowns have brightened the faces of some 100,000 children since 1993, said Joan Barrington, co-ordinator of the program, which is celebrating its 10th year.

"These children grow up very, very quickly. They know

the language, they know their medications," said Barrington, also known as Bunky the clown.

'The luckiest people'

"I believe the clown not only allows play. It reminds the parents as well they are children first, then sick children."

Sometimes the play has a purpose, including blowing

bubbles to work young lungs, she said. It is emotional and physically draining work, said Barrington, but also rewarding: "We are the luckiest people in the world. We have a job where someone comes up and gives you the biggest hug in the world."

A Circus Circus! night Oct. 19 will toast the 10th anniversary and raise money for the clown program. Tickets are \$100 and available by calling 416-813-6629.



— Michael Peake, SUN

■ **MANUEL HEDERICH, 8, yuks it up with "therapeutic clowns" Nuula and Doko at Sick Kids hospital yesterday.**



— Michael Peake, SUN

■ **DOKO the clown brings a smile to the face of Sick Kids patient Brett Davey, 7.**