



ROCKCASTLE  
REGIONAL  
HOSPITAL ■ RESPIRATORY CARE CENTER



# LittleLUNGS

*fresh*AIR

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## Little Lungs CEO Message

# Helping the Smallest Patients Take Their Biggest Breaths Yet

At the Respiratory Care Center at Rockcastle Regional Hospital, it's not uncommon to find 10 or more young patients under the age of three at any given time. Many of these children have complex medical histories: some were born prematurely with underdeveloped lungs, others with rare birth defects or conditions linked to drug exposure in utero. Some arrived after experiencing accidents such as near-drowning.

Despite the wide range of circumstances that bring them to us, these children have one thing in common—the need for mechanical ventilation. And our goal remains the same for each of them: to provide the highest quality of care possible with the ultimate goal of helping them breathe on their own.

In recent years, we've seen an increase in pediatric patients at our facility. So far, in 2025 alone, four children have been discharged—most returning home after being successfully weaned from their ventilators. That kind of progress is both inspiring and worth sharing.

Inside this second edition of Little Lungs magazine, you'll learn more about how we care for our youngest patients—how we pair expert clinical treatment with compassionate communication and emotional support for families.

You'll also meet children like Levi and Grant, who both were weaned from ventilator care and went to their respective homes this summer, and get a glimpse into the teamwork and dedication that make moments like theirs possible.

**Stephen A. Estes**  
President and CEO

Rockcastle Regional Hospital and Respiratory Care Center



# From Ventilators to Victory

## Young Patients Find New Life at Rockcastle Regional Hospital



"Rockcastle Regional has been great," said Dalton Walton, Levi's dad. "We love everyone there. They were all really good to him."

At Rockcastle Regional Hospital's Respiratory Care Center, miracles happen every day—especially for its youngest patients. The largest freestanding ventilator-care facility in the nation, the center has over time provided its transformative care to more and more smaller patients.

Among them was three-year-old Levi Wallen, who came to the facility in 2023 unable to breathe on his own due to pulmonary hypertension. After spending most of his life in hospitals, Levi found not only expert medical care at Rockcastle, but also emotional support and a sense of home. "It's just really good care, especially on the engagement level," said his father, Dalton, who drove more than an hour from Tennessee to visit almost daily.

Finally, in July of this year, Levi got to go home. "It's a dream come true," Dalton said. "I could not be happier."

And Levi could not be more on the move. "He is all over the place," his dad said. "He loves being home. He's walking, climbing, and reaching for anything he can get a hold of."

"Rockcastle has been great," he continued. "We love everyone there. They were all really good to him."



On Levi's "Discharge Day," family and staff celebrate the beginning of a new chapter.

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he loves being home.  
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**Dalton Wallen**  
Levi's Dad

Each child's journey begins with a comprehensive evaluation by specialists, followed by a personalized, multi-disciplinary care plan. Children receive physical, occupational, and speech therapies. They attend an on-site classroom supported by Rockcastle County Schools. They engage in activities tailored to spark joy and developmental growth. For families who live far away, communication is constant, with Facetime check-ins and 24/7 access to nursing and social work staff.

Each year, the facility will treat and discharge eight to ten pediatrics patients, often returning to a home environment after successfully being weaned from the ventilator.

"That's the goal," said CEO Stephen A. Estes. "To get them healed and on their way to a life independent of ventilator care."

For staff, discharges are bittersweet. It can be months and sometimes years in the making, but when that happens, there's nothing sweeter, or in some ways, bittersweet, than the "goodbye ceremony" that takes place as the residents leave the facility to a new life of independence.

Facility team members line the hallway holding farewell signs, smiling, often fighting back tears. Then they say goodbye.



Teachers Katherine Coffey and Shelby Wynn provide structured education for children of the Respiratory Care Center



# More Than a Lesson Plan


## The Power of Connection in Rockcastle's Classrooms

In teaching the kids at Rockcastle Regional's Respiratory Care Center, K-12 teacher Katherine Coffey and pre-school teacher Shelby Wynn have learned that relationships equal results.

"When we address their unique needs and establish relationships, they're able to learn," Wynn said.

For example, for a child who loves science, Coffey might lean into lessons about dinosaurs or volcanoes. For others who are more physically interactive, she may use hands-on teaching tools such as puzzles or games.

"I try to hone in on their interests and meet them where they are," she said.



**“With these kids,  
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**Shelby Wynn**  
Rockcastle Pre-school Teacher

An important part of the Respiratory Care Center’s commitment to enhancing quality of life is delivering on-site education to school-aged patients. That is done by partnering with Rockcastle County Schools to bring education directly to about 20 students at any given time.

Upon admission, each child receives a comprehensive evaluation, and an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is developed to meet both medical and academic needs.

Students from pre-school to high school follow a tailored curriculum, with some using assistive technology or modified instruction. Depending on their abilities, they may learn in their rooms or in the on-site 600-square-foot classroom designed for reading, art, music, and play. A full kitchen allows students to participate in cooking activities, fostering independence and life skills.

To create a sense of normalcy and comfort, staff also assist with personal care tasks like brushing teeth, grooming, and nail care—helping students feel prepared and confident each day.

Because all students rely on mechanical ventilators, the clinical team plays an essential role in supporting both their health and educational progress. This integrated, compassionate approach ensures that every child has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive—no matter their medical needs.

“With these kids, I’m going to meet them where they are and we’re going to see how far they can go,” Wynn said. “As far as I’m concerned, there are no limits.”



# A Lifeline for One Family, A Beacon for Many



Cayden and his mother, Jessica Abdoo

**For the family of Cayden Campbell, the journey to healing has been long and filled with challenges. After several difficult years and countless emergency room visits, they found themselves at a crossroads—exhausted, out of options, and in need of help.**

That's when they discovered the Respiratory Care Center at Rockcastle Regional Hospital.

"I'd never heard of it before," said Cayden's grandfather, Lloyd Abdoo, a well-known businessman who has worked all over the state. "Even with all my knowledge of Kentucky, it was off my radar. But it turned out to be the answer to our prayers."

Cayden, now 17, suffered a brain injury in a drowning accident at age five. With complex medical needs, the family had a difficult time finding the right setting for Cayden, and his condition was deteriorating. He sometimes was taken to the emergency room several times each week.





Three years after finding the Respiratory Care Center, the transformation has been almost miraculous.

“They’re the greatest people on the planet,” Abdoo said of the staff. “They’ve done wonders for Cayden. I can’t say enough about how they’ve treated our family.”

Cayden has made incredible strides. Once unable to communicate, he now responds to questions with his eyes and interacts using adaptive devices like switches and iPads. Seizures, tremors, and aspiration—once daily occurrences—have vanished. He attends school and shows clear signs of mental engagement and joy.

It’s not just the medical care that sets Rockcastle apart—it’s the people. “They’re angels,” Abdoo said of the staff. “They seem to dedicate their lives to their patients and their patients’ families.” Whether it’s late-night phone calls about a fever spike or thoughtful outings to malls and movie theaters, Abdoo said their support never wavers.

**“They’re the greatest people on the planet. They’ve done wonders for Cayden. I can’t say enough about how they’ve treated our family.”**

**Lloyd Abdoo**  
Cayden’s Grandfather

While medical science continues to evolve, Cayden’s family, who describes him as a sweet and loving child, is hopeful that his future is bright. And for them, Rockcastle’s Respiratory Care Center isn’t just a facility—it’s hope made real.

“There’s no way I could ever explain what this place means to us,” Abdoo says. “It’s simply awesome.”



# The World Awaits

## Toddler's new journey begins after discharge

Like anyone else's, Amanda Smith's days are busy. The Manchester resident works every weekend at the Respiratory Care Center at Rockcastle Regional Hospital as a registered nurse on the pediatrics wing.

When three-and-a-half-year-old Grant Towery was discharged from the facility on a Wednesday in August, she made time to drive the 45 minutes from her home to be there when he left.

Grant, born prematurely and suffering from chronic lung disease, had arrived two years earlier.

"When he first came," Amanda recalled. "I remember he was anxious a lot, probably scared of all of the new faces. He loved to be held, loved to be rocked."

Grant's journey had begun, and those new faces soon became like family.



And once patients are admitted, the team's skilled, caring hands begin the holistic, multi-disciplinary treatment process with one abiding goal in mind – weaning patients from ventilator care so they can live a more independent life.

When that happens, staff gather around to say their goodbyes on what's known as "Discharge Day,"

**"It's sad, because it feels like a part of us is leaving when our babies leave; but it's also a very happy time, knowing he's going home with a good family to live a more independent life."**

**Amanda Smith**  
Pediatric RN

"I wouldn't have missed it," Smith said of Grant's discharge.

"It's sad, because it feels like a part of us is leaving when our babies leave," she said candidly, "but it's also a very happy time, knowing he's going home with a good family to live a more independent life."

Grant's mom, Courtney, is grateful.

"This was the only option in several states, the only place willing to get him out of the NICU," she recalled.

She looks forward to seeing him discover the joy of walking through a park, petting animals he's never encountered, and experiencing new things.

"We're excited to see his reaction to the world."



## Preparing For Independence

The Respiratory Care Center's goal is to provide the best care possible to maximize the chances that patients will one day be able to live independent of the ventilator. When it happens, facility staff ensures the patient and family are trained and equipped for the transition. From medication administration to CPR training, families receive comprehensive support. Social services staff ensures seamless transitions, arranging home healthcare, connecting families with outpatient therapy, and organizing transportation when needed.

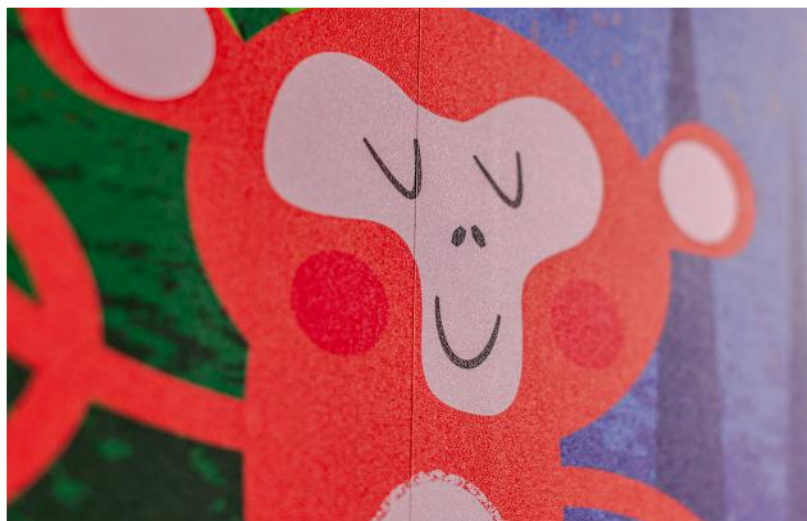




# Little Lungs, Big Breaths











# ROCKCASTLE REGIONAL HOSPITAL RESPIRATORY CARE CENTER

## Mission

Rockcastle Regional Hospital and Respiratory Care Center is a family-oriented team of healthcare professionals dedicated to **delivering the highest quality of care** to those we serve.

## Vision

Rockcastle Regional Hospital and Respiratory Care Center's vision is to be the **hospital of choice for healthcare** in Rockcastle County and surrounding areas and to be the facility of choice nationwide for ventilator care.

## Values

We value **excellence, friendliness, compassion, cleanliness**, and our commitment to our community.

## Accreditation

All Rockcastle Regional Hospital and Respiratory Care Center facilities and programs are **accredited by The Joint Commission**.



2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2015  
2016, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024





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Taha Ayach, MD, Nephrology

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Charles Barton, MD, Gynecology

Owais Bhatti, MD, Nephrology

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