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# Pediatric Focus

## Philanthropy Partnerships Can Transform Healthcare

By **Katy Welkie**, Chief Executive Officer, *Intermountain Primary Children's Hospital*,  
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**Thanks to in-utero surgery repairing her spina bifida, two-year-old Abigail Rose has already taken her first steps.** In the years ahead, this procedure will provide other families with the same opportunity to imagine a brighter future for their children. Abigail Rose and her mom were the first patients to undergo in-utero spina bifida surgery in Utah.

Such life-changing care, previously unavailable in the Intermountain West, is only possible because of the true partnership forged between Intermountain Primary Children's Hospital and the communities we serve. And it's the power of this type of partnership that health leaders, backed by the strength and wisdom of their boards of directors, must harness to meet our nation's rising needs, today and into the future.

Last November, community leaders and Intermountain Health unveiled [Primary Promise](#), an innovative and ambitious initiative to create the nation's model health system for children.

This effort represents the most significant investment ever made to the health and wellness of children across Utah and the Intermountain West. It will strengthen Intermountain Primary Children's Hospital, address emerging health needs of the children in the communities we currently serve, and expand access to pediatric care throughout the Intermountain West.

It didn't begin as a system mandate or a competitive strategy. Rather, it began as an outgrowth from dreamscape discussions around what philanthropy might enable to make pediatric care even better, and accessible to more children.

I recognize that many children's hospitals can relate to bold philanthropic campaigns, and many have a long history of philanthropy. Others may feel philanthropy is becoming more of a priority. Everyone in healthcare seems to be thinking about it

more, wanting it, or rooting for it. Our proud story is about acting on it, which was difficult, but among the very best decisions we have ever made.

Wherever board members may be in their journey, I hope these ideas and lessons learned can inspire a way forward.

## **1. Be Bold**

Primary Promise comes at a time when healthcare nationally faces major challenges. Margins are tighter than ever and persistent staffing shortages are colliding with economic shifts—a perfect storm of uncertainty forcing tough decisions on children’s healthcare delivery nationally.

The truth is: our kids can’t wait.

We continue to treat more kids with increasingly complex needs. Despite strong research clarifying the importance of social determinants in health outcomes, support programs addressing education, employment, and physical environments are beyond the scope of payer reimbursements. No hospital alone can underwrite the investment needed to create a holistic health system for an entire population. And the role of government can only go so far.

Philanthropy in not-for-profit healthcare is essential in addressing these gaps. Strengthening healthcare delivery for children is a unique space where one’s finite philanthropic dollar can go furthest in touching lives and communities. There is no community or constituency left untouched by healthcare.

From our dreamscape discussions, Intermountain Health determined that at least \$600 million is required to help us get upstream on social determinants of health, strengthen Primary Children’s Hospital, and fund innovations to expand the reach of the hospital’s excellence throughout the Intermountain West.

The investment would need to be shared between Intermountain Health and philanthropy through the Primary Promise campaign created by Intermountain Foundation—a group of individuals who work closely with me and my team on fundraising strategy and outreach. Together, we spent more than a year determining children’s health needs and the vision required to innovatively address them. We spent about two more years creating the public-facing Primary Promise campaign that would invite our community to be our partners in making history. This required

input and commitment from many areas of our health system, amid a series of other—sometimes dueling—priorities.

In the end, our system leaders and board members worked together to imagine, think big, and determine unequivocally that making pediatrics the centerpiece for this transformative period will result in a more sophisticated care landscape in the future. By the time it was formalized and announced publicly in 2022, Primary Promise represented the boldest, largest philanthropic goal in the 101-year history of Primary Children’s Hospital and Intermountain Health.

It wasn’t easy. It required a leap of faith for many people. Honestly, finding myself on the front end of a massive fundraising goal seemed like an ocean to cross. I have dedicated my 40-year career to helping children as a critical care nurse and leader, but was new to transformative, major gift fundraising. It’s been a huge learning experience, and I must say, without hesitation, it’s been one of the most gratifying aspects of my career.

From the pronouncement of our vision, friends and supporters showed up with a renewed energy. We formed new relationships with people who trusted us as if we were old friends and supported Primary Promise wholeheartedly. I’m moved by the profound generosity extended to this campaign by many today who describe their gifts as central to their family’s legacy. What an incredible honor this work continues to be.

## **2. Recruit, Inspire, and Engage Existing and New Leadership Around a Strong Vision**

Primary Promise has engaged some of the most influential people in the Intermountain West—many involved with us for the first time—and their influence has extended beyond dollars. This engagement was led by the transformative gift and support of our Intermountain Health Board Chair Emeritus Gail Miller, Owner and Board Chair of the Larry H. Miller Group of Companies.

Ms. Miller is a well-known and respected business and community leader in Utah. She is a children’s health champion who was willing to lead the campaign with three other engaged community and civic leaders: Crystal Maggelet, Chair and CEO of FJ Management Inc. and Intermountain Health board member; Steve Lund, Co-Founder and Executive Board Chair of Nu Skin Enterprises; and most recently, Spencer Zwick, Co-Founder and Managing Partner of Solamere Capital and Former Senior Advisor to Senator Mitt Romney, R-Utah.

This leadership team added instant credibility, and other volunteer leadership joined them to build an extraordinary campaign cabinet. Because each is well-known, incredibly successful, and ostensibly busy with career, family, and other community endeavors, their coming together got the attention of many.

Together, their leadership and support has been invaluable in garnering interest, attracting support, and engaging others in our bold vision for the future.

### **3. Refocus Time, Teams, and Energy to Support the Campaign**

The power of system and local directors and other volunteer leadership backing Primary Promise in the community is immeasurable. Their support in face-to-face meetings, community conversations, and social media posts has electrified this campaign and their fellow board members.

Their dedication, combined with that of the Primary Promise campaign co-chairs, allowed me to remain fully engaged in my healthcare leadership roles and lend my voice to the campaign in a way that complemented their efforts, be it in a hospital tour or private presentations.

Most critical has been our directors' engagement throughout the process. From challenging us to think big when setting the vision, to personally giving, to connecting us to colleagues and friends and hosting events, our board members have been a driving force in the campaign's continued growth.

We are also fortunate to have a top-notch team of professionals within the Intermountain Foundation to help support these efforts through campaign planning, research, strategy deployment, event planning, communications, volunteer engagement and outreach, and continually lifting the profile and visibility of Primary Promise in our community through an incredible word-of-mouth network. This team remains critical to our philanthropic efforts and ultimate success, while allowing me and my team to do and represent what we do best.

### **Where Are We Now as a Result of These Efforts?**

With the community's help, we have surpassed \$500 million of our minimum \$600 million goal. Primary Promise has allowed us to:

- Advance innovation in numerous, profound ways, including virtual hospital networks to bring world-class care to communities at risk and keep patients closer to home.

- Strengthen pediatric behavioral health offerings through the development of our crisis line and mobile response units, bringing care to a child’s home, for free.
- Create our new center for personalized medicine to offer novel therapeutics for kids with rare conditions, and the Grant Scott Bonham Fetal Center, the facility that made such an impact on young Abigail Rose.

I have witnessed firsthand what’s possible when directors and community and philanthropic leaders are asked to join together and confront profound challenges. We have come to the table as partners to identify needs and create a clear, comprehensive plan to address them—and our visionaries are rising to the occasion to help.

Other hospital leaders and board members, including those outside of pediatric care, might consider this emerging model as they explore transformative ways to engage their own communities and tap into the philanthropic spirit around them.

### → Key Board Takeaways

- Discuss how philanthropy can be better utilized to strengthen your organization and improve care for children in your communities.
- Be bold in your vision for the future. Determine children’s top health needs and the vision required to innovatively address them. Take the time to receive input from various constituencies, and work together with the community and senior leadership to imagine, think big, and earn buy-in and support.
- Recruit and engage existing and new leadership around a strong vision. Having the right leaders championing these efforts can help create credibility and attract support from others.
- As a board member, consider how you can help support and create energy around philanthropy efforts (e.g., through community conversations, connecting with colleagues, giving, hosting events, etc.).
- Cultivate philanthropy to become a sustaining cultural pillar and priority of your organization. It should play a lead role in gathering, involving, and motivating the community around your mission over time, and in many ways, defining who you are.

Thinking about where I was in my appreciation for and experience with philanthropy pre-campaign to where I am today, I hope our experiences can inspire others to consider this leap as well. It's a next dimension of leadership that I had not anticipated, and I am profoundly glad that I took that leap of faith to experience it.

I'm ever grateful to the volunteer leaders who have boldly taken the leap with all of us, to benefit countless lives and generations.

*The Governance Institute thanks Katy Welkie, Chief Executive Officer, Intermountain Primary Children's Hospital, and Vice President, Children's Health for Intermountain Health, for contributing this article. She can be reached at [katy.welkie@imail.org](mailto:katy.welkie@imail.org).*

