A little bit of sunshine

■ Benefit aimed at enhancing decor for kids confined by medical needs

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Ken Blaze/News-Herald

Chandler Monahan, 2, who has spent her life hooked to a respirator, is held by her mom, Debbie, as Halle Chiappone looks on. The women want to create dream bedrooms for children who rarely get to leave them.

A bedroom and its medical equipment can become the entire world for a child born with critical medical needs.

So girlfriends Debbie Monahan and Halle Chiappone are teaming up for an unusual fundraiser that will help to create a less medical atmosphere for such children.

The Feb. 1 benefit, called Color Your Corner, takes place at the new Chardonnay's Day Spa and Salon in Concord Township. It's on a Sunday, when most salons are otherwise closed. Proceeds from salon and spa services will help fund the Color Your Corner bedrooms.

The women, both professional decorators, know first-hand how to widen the world of a child with a high level of medical needs.

Chiappone was inspired by an uncle who had cerebral palsy and other medical needs, and was confined to a wheelchair. And Monahan's daughter, Chandler, is dependent on a ventilator for her breathing. Her underlying diagnosis is spina bifida, but 2-year-old Chandler also has a breathing disorder that has thus far defied diagnosis.

"But she's a smart little girl and she's made great strides with her breathing," Monahan said. For Chandler, the temper tantrums of the "terrible twos" make her stop breathing and turn blue, her mother said. The couple manages her day-to-day care themselves with 18 hours of nursing services each week.

"A nurse comes in every night so we can sleep," Monahan said.

After Monahan and her husband Joe lost another daughter, Brynn, to spina bifida, they established a golf outing charity, the Brynn Monahan Open, to benefit the Spina Bifida Clinic at Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital of University Hospitals of Cleveland.

The couple's son, Liam, 7, adores his little sister, Monahan said. "We try to answer his questions and be very honest and brief with him."

"The last couple of years have been really tough for us," she conceded. "I'm really thankful for Rainbow."

Everything in the Monahan household is medically focussed, she said.

"Amazingly upbeat," is how Chiappone describes her friend. "She realizes these are the cards that life has dealt to her and she just has to deal with them. And that's exactly what she does, one day at a time."

Monahan's decorating business, Window Treatments by Debbie, and Chiappone 's professional skills as an interior designer for Charley's Loft in Mentor, are an important combination for creating cheerful rooms in which children will be confined.

Child life specialists at Rainbow will select the children who will receive the bedrooms of their dreams.

Bright and cheerful colors are just the starting point.

"The main thing to remember is that these are kids rooms, and the child 's personality should be reflected in the room," Chiappone said. "Their environment is so limited that they need to be encouraged to let their fantasy go."

Her friend Debbie's experience in doing fund-raisers helped the two friends flesh out the idea for their Color Your Corner benefit.

"And when Debbie was getting her hair done at Chardonnay's Spa and happened to mention it to Heather (Janesz) , she volunteered the Spa and its services to help out," Chiappone said.

Several spa packages have already been reserved for the event.

"Army green" ventilators and oxygen tanks may be a essential to a child's room, but they don't have to dominant the mood, Chiappone said. "They can be camouflaged with fabric and skirts can be put on carts so it looks a little less like a hospital room."

She also thinking about designing accessories. A bag made from the same fabric used in the bedroom might be crafted to carry a favorite toy for hospital visits.

"Most of these moms have so much going on just keeping their child's health going that they don't even have the energy left to think of the bedroom," Chiappone said.

■ Details

- **What:** Color Your Corner, a benefit
- **When:** 1 to 6 p.m., Feb. 1
- **Where:** Chardonnay's Day Spa and Salon, 7537 Fredel Drive, Concord Twp.
- **Info:** (440) 357-6766; www.chardonnaysspa.com.
- **Why:** Part of the proceeds from four different packages, ranging in price from $60 to $250, go to Color Your Corner along with 25 percent of the proceeds from products purchased. Packages include various combinations of massage, pedicure, manicure, hair styling, eye treatment, facials and makeup application.