

What Critically Ill Kids Can Teach Us

by Awakin Call Editors

In 2013, Shay Beider accompanied an anxious little boy into the office of Dr. Faye Ghishan, the Physician in Chief and a pediatric gastroenterologist at Diamond Children's Hospital in Tucson, Arizona. The boy was soon to undergo an endoscopy, an invasive scope to examine the digestive tract. Such procedures could be traumatic for children because they required an IV placement; nurses often had to chase children down the hall and administer a shot to sedate them. So Beider asked Dr. Ghishan if she might try "Integrative Touch Therapy" on the boy, one of the many services she was pioneering through the nonprofit organization she founded, Integrative Touch for Kids (ITK). Within minutes, the boy was calm. Nearly asleep, in fact. "Oh my God," Dr. Ghishan remarked, "you need to do whatever you do for all of my patients!"

Several years earlier, ITK was born from a moment of clarity when Beider was still a college student at UCLA. A pre-med major at the time, she was shadowing doctors at Children's Hospital Los Angeles and watched a girl tremble with fear before surgery. Feeling compassion and a desire to help, Beider suddenly awakened: "It doesn't have to look like this." She could serve children and their families with something she'd already been delivering—healing touch. To put herself through college, Beider had been working as a massage therapist. Why not bring gentle, caring touch directly into healthcare?

Beider would eventually create a new therapeutic approach called Integrative Touch Therapy. ITK would, in addition to providing hands-on therapies for kids, organize large scale retreats, playdates, community events, and support groups at little or no cost to the families. "When a child has special needs," says Beider, "the whole family has special needs—period." The organization operates by the generosity of its donors and its volunteers, including young children and teenagers. During Covid-19, the TeleFriend and TeleWellness programs have continued to serve children, parents and healthcare providers internationally.

Since its founding in 2005, ITK has become a leader in pediatric integrative medicine. Beider hopes to expand its existing programs, develop new wellness models to be replicated nationally, and create a first of its kind healing center in Tucson, AZ, with a model called "Health-Caring." The future of healthcare, according to Beider, is where "high tech and high touch meet."

ITK has been featured in the Washington Post and on ABC, NBC, and PBS, among other

media outlets. ITK's impacts have been measured to show significant decreases in pain, fear, and anxiety, as well as increases in overall well-being, self-efficacy, and relationships. When she's not speaking or teaching around the US and abroad, Beider hosts a popular podcast, Conversations on Healing featuring guests such as Daniel Goleman and Kristin Neff. Among her recognitions are the Women's Studies Achievement Award from UCLA, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as a Pioneer for Children's Wellbeing, and most recently, the 2020 Civic Leadership Award from the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona.

"If I can help to create mechanisms that enable people in our communities to rise up and meet suffering with love, more fully, more completely, with more opportunity," Beider says, "then that's enough."

Join this Saturday's Awakin Call with Shay Beider. RSVP info and more details [here](#).