

The King's Daughters: Over a Century of Caring

Beginnings

In 1886, a small group of young women from Granby Street Methodist Church in Norfolk embraced the motto of the newly formed International Order of The King's Daughters and Sons: *“Look up, not down; Look forward, not back; Look out, not in; Lend a hand.”* Their mission was simple yet profound, to serve those in need.

By 1897, they had launched a Visiting Nurse Service, hiring Edith Nason, RN, who tirelessly cared for families in Norfolk's poorest neighborhoods. Soon, more “Circles” of women joined, forming the Norfolk City Union of The King's Daughters (NCUKD). Their work expanded to include food kitchens, hygiene education, and support during epidemics, laying the foundation for a century of service.

Growth and Community Response

The King's Daughters quickly became a vital force in Hampton Roads. They provided milk, coal, clothing, and companionship to struggling families, often at their own expense. During the 1918 flu epidemic, they fed hundreds daily. Collaborations with civic groups and the Red Cross led to health stations, birth registrations, and anti-tuberculosis campaigns.

In 1913, they opened a Baby Clinic that grew into the King's Daughters Children's Clinic, offering pediatric care, dentistry, and maternity services. Despite financial struggles, the women rallied community support to keep the clinic open, proving their resilience and determination.

A Hospital for Children

By the 1950s, the clinic was aging, and the dream of a dedicated children's hospital took shape. Against doubts, the women raised funds through bake sales, coupon drives, and personal donations. In 1961, Children's Hospital of The King's Daughters (CHKD) opened — Virginia's first and only free-standing pediatric hospital.

Within two years, CHKD had a pediatric residency program and full accreditation. By the mid-1960s, it was treating tens of thousands of children annually, many unable to pay. The King's Daughters balanced budgets while sewing pajamas, painting cheerful murals, and lobbying for state support. Their blend of compassion and business savvy became the hospital's hallmark.

Expansion and Modernization

As medicine advanced, so did CHKD. The 1970s brought neonatal and pediatric intensive care units, and by 1979, a major expansion increased capacity to 128 beds. By the 1980s,

CHKD was the region's pediatric referral center, performing complex surgeries and pioneering new treatments.

To safeguard the hospital's future, the King's Daughters helped establish Children's Health System in 1984, allowing them to focus on fundraising and volunteerism while ensuring financial stability. Their efforts grew into signature events like the Holly Ball, Festival of Trees, and RunWalk for the Kids, alongside CHKD Thrift Stores, which now raise millions annually.

Today and Legacy

Now more than 1,100 members strong in 47 circles, The King's Daughters continue their mission through hospital volunteering, community events, and advocacy for children's health. Their enduring legacy is love for children; from a single visiting nurse to a thriving pediatric hospital, their devotion has touched generations of families across Hampton Roads.

For over 100 years, The King's Daughters have proven that compassion, determination, and community spirit can change lives. Their story is not just history; it is a living tradition of care.