S taying in a hospital can be frightening and cause anxiety in children, which is why Mercyhealth’s Javon Bea Hospital–Riverside has created a space meant to calm and relax them. The Pediatric Healing Garden, which is fully funded by the Mercyhealth Development Foundation, is an acre of soothing green space outside the neonatal and pediatric units that brings the outdoors closer to patients. Research has shown that nature is one of the most powerful healing forces, and over the past year, doctors, nurses and other staff at the hospital have seen firsthand how true that is.

The Pediatric Healing Garden at Javon Bea Hospital–Riverside offers a place of respite and a breath of fresh air during hospital stays. The garden is filled with beautiful landscaping, interactive and fun playground equipment, a meditation zone, and quiet places to sit and feel close to nature.
Mary Baldauf, MD, pediatric critical care intensivist at Javon Bea Hospital–Riverside, remembers one 9-year-old boy who was having a meltdown, so she wheeled him out to the garden. He played a song on the xylophone with his sister, drove a remote-controlled car around the garden and watched the sunset with his mom. “When it was time to go,” she says, “he looked up from his wheelchair and said, ‘I feel like a king,’ and his mom just cried.

On Easter Sunday, an adult patient’s husband and children had come to spend the day with her. While they waited inside the playroom, doctors and staff snuck out to the garden and hid Easter eggs so they could keep their annual Easter egg hunt tradition alive. It was so fun that they repeated the process for several other families, including children with diabetes who found eggs filled with toys rather than candy.

And one spring day, a boy in the intensive care unit watched his mom cry as she video chatted with his older sister, who was about to go to the prom. His sister and dad brought the dress to the hospital, where the mom was able to dress her daughter and fix her hair. The girl’s date came to the hospital and they took pictures of the two together in the garden, with the snow falling down.

Doctors and staff have been able to use the garden for snowball fights with their patients during the winter and as a viewing spot for fireworks in July. It has become a gathering place, a play place and a haven. “The garden has transformed the lives of hospitalized children by giving them a sense of normalcy, a safe place to play and a place to laugh and have fun with their families,” says Dr. Baldauf.

On the first day of summer, pediatric patients were able to go outside, enjoy the sun and play in the Pediatric Healing Garden.

Kayla and Isabelle played together in the Pediatric Healing Garden while undergoing their IV therapy treatment. It was the first time these two patients met. They found out they had a lot in common — they share the same diagnosis and are one year apart in age. It’s so important for kids just to be able to be kids while they’re at Javon Bea Hospital–Riverside.

On Easter Sunday, an adult patient’s husband and children had come to spend the day with her. While they waited inside the playroom, doctors and staff snuck out to the garden and hid Easter eggs so they could keep their annual Easter egg hunt tradition alive. It was so fun that they repeated the process for several other families, including children with diabetes who found eggs filled with toys rather than candy.