Montage Health receives unprecedented $105.8 million gift to transform mental healthcare for children, teens

MONTEREY, CA – Roberta “Bertie” Bialek Elliott wanted to do something transformational in the place she calls home. And she has — donating $105.8 million to Montage Health Foundation, the largest gift ever in Monterey County and one of the most significant philanthropic commitments nationwide over the past decade.

The extraordinary gift will be devoted exclusively to creating an innovative approach to child and adolescent behavioral health. Elliott chose the name Ohana — Hawaiian for “family”— for the unprecedented venture that will include everything from a bricks-and-mortar Ohana House to early intervention, comprehensive support for young people and their families, and partnerships with an extensive collection of community organizations.

“Very few people are fortunate enough to be able to give a gift of this size, and there are even fewer who have the vision to fund this particular cause,” said Montage Health President/CEO Dr. Steven Packer. “Bertie Bialek Elliott said that she was concerned that, if she didn’t do it, a transformational gift to fund this needed program might never occur. We are exceedingly grateful for her tremendous generosity and the spirit in which she gave this historic gift.”

Elliott previously gave a $100 million gift to her alma mater, Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill. She and her three daughters established the Berkshire Foundation in 1996 and have supported many organizations and institutions through it. She was an early investor in Berkshire Hathaway, founded by her brother, legendary investor Warren Buffett.

Elliott’s confidence in Montage Health, the parent company of Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, led to her latest remarkable gift. She has served on Montage Health’s board of trustees and been a leading force behind and generous supporter of other projects, including Community Hospital’s Comprehensive Cancer Center, Family Birth Center, and Inpatient Rehabilitation Center.

“Trust was number one for me,” Elliott said. “I knew that whatever I decided on, it would happen. I have faith in Steve (Packer) and everyone else at Montage Health to carry it through.”
Elliott had expressed interest in making a transformational gift to Montage Health, and after being presented with several options, she chose behavioral health services for children and teens.

“It popped right out that this was something that wouldn’t happen without a special, big gift,” Elliott said. “Montage Health, in general, is one of the few places that touches everyone in our community sooner or later. This benefits the community as a whole.”

Statistics bear out the need:

- **1 in 13** California children suffer from a mental illness that limits participation in daily activities, according to the California Health Care Foundation
- A survey in 2014-2017 by the California Department of Education found that nearly **1 in 3 Monterey high school students** suffered depression-related feelings.
- California has **fewer than 1,050 child psychiatrists** to serve more than **9 million children** and teens.
- 44 of California’s 58 counties — including Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz — have **no child/adolescent psychiatric beds**, according to the California Hospital Association

In Monterey County, when crisis strikes for a young person and their family, children and adolescents may spend several days in an emergency room, waiting for a bed to be located in a county 2 or more hours and more than 100 miles away. Often, they return to the emergency department, where the cycle begins again.

“Clearly, there is a pressing need to completely change — to transform — the way this kind of care is provided and to intervene much earlier and much more thoughtfully to prevent issues from reaching a crisis point,” Packer said. “That vision could only be realized with a level of support that is unprecedented in our community.”

The first step in this transformational undertaking is a national search for an innovator in pediatric/adolescent behavioral health. This clinical director will be charged with creating and maintaining an unparalleled program of care.

Following that, over the course of the next 5 years, there will be the extensive development of programs throughout the community that involve the entire family, schools, pediatricians, community and government organizations, and others. There will also be the construction of Ohana House, the hub for all things Ohana. Ohana House will be a warm and welcoming place, with inpatient care in a peaceful, healing environment, as well as a broad range of outpatient programs, services, and partnerships.

A significant portion of the gift will be placed in an endowment, to provide funding for Ohana into the future. Plans for the overall project are very preliminary and subject to change as the project moves from concept to reality.
As envisioned, Ohana House would be built on property owned by Montage Health at Ryan Ranch in Monterey and would include:

• 18-24 inpatient beds, with separate areas for boys and girls
• Indoor and outdoor recreational and quiet spaces
• An outpatient treatment wing
• Rooms for one-on-one and family counseling
• Work and office space for community activities
• Educational space for training and workshops

All the Ohana efforts will be focused on innovation, creating a new model of child and adolescent behavioral healthcare with elements that can be replicated in other communities since the issues faced in Monterey County know no borders or bounds.

“Our goal is to use Bertie Bialek Elliott's gift to develop a program that can be emulated by others throughout the nation,” Packer said. “We consider this an investment in the future of countless children and families and we are committed to being the best stewards possible. We have always been committed not only to innovation, but to doing the right thing. This is the right thing. We are ready to go.”

Learn more about the Ohana project and Bertie Bialek Elliott at montagehealth.org/ohana

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About Montage Health
Montage Health is the local, nonprofit parent company of a family of organizations dedicated to improving lives by delivering exceptional care and inspiring the pursuit of optimal health. Through its subsidiaries and its partnerships with doctors and other clinicians, healthcare and community organizations, and, most importantly community members, Montage Health is dedicated to care that is coordinated across all care settings to meet each person's goals and needs. Montage Health companies include Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, Montage Medical Group, Montage Health Foundation, Montage Wellness Center, Aspire Health Plan, and Community Health Innovations.