



## Bay Village woman says Gathering Place's Parachutes program is big help for her daughter

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By **Kate Gluck, Sun News**



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Marie Lowther of Bay Village spends a little quality time with daughters Lily and Clara in the playroom at The Gathering Place West.

For Bay Village resident Marie Lowther and her 9-year-old daughter Lily, the best part about The Gathering Place is Parachutes, a biweekly support group for children dealing with the illness of an adult family member.

Lily has been participating in Parachutes for more than a year-and-a-half at The Gathering Place, a support community for those touched by cancer.

Lowther was diagnosed with thyroid cancer

in December 2008. After an initial surgery and radioactive iodine treatment, tests indicated that the cancer was more widespread than initially thought. She underwent more extensive surgery the day before Thanksgiving in 2009.

Although she has been told she will never be 100 percent cancer free because of how the cancer spread, she said that the disease does not affect her day-to-day life.

"It is so microscopic, it is something I will just live with," she said. She goes in for checkups with her endocrinologist every six months

"I am very fortunate. I had a shorter journey than . . . It was a year of our lives. It was a very difficult time of our lives, but we are moving on," she added.

Parachutes is one of the things that has helped with the moving on.

Shortly after the second surgery, Lowther and her husband Terry became aware that their older daughter, Lily, was having a hard time dealing with the issue. Their younger daughter, Clara Maeve, who was still breastfeeding at the time of diagnosis, was too young to realize what was happening. Fortunately, they found The Gathering Place.

After a friend referred the family to The Gathering Place, Lowther went to the east side location for a day of pampering. In talking with others there she found out that there were great programs for the kids. A few weeks later, she began taking Lily to Parachutes and has been taking her ever since.

Through Parachutes, Lily has created bonds with other children dealing with similar issues.

"I think that with Lily, the fact that she has created bonds with these kids who are in the same boat has helped," Lowther said. "Cancer is a scary word to a child to put a face (on it). Knowing that there are other kids out there who are dealing with it makes her see that it is OK — that she can deal with it."

"She has so much fun when she goes there . . . They put a positive spin on the situation. They talk about it . . . what is going on, how the family member is doing, what is good and bad in their lives and then they do an activity," she added.

Parachutes also offers special opportunities for the children to bond, such as a week at the riding stables in Rocky River, which Lily participated in last summer.

Asked if she would refer The Gathering Place to others and why, Lowther said that she would definitely put it out there as a good resource.

"Going back to my story, I would recommend it to the young families who are struggling with the diagnosis, and helping their children get through the worst and see the positives," Lowther added.

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