



Sterntaler Children's Hospice

A retreat for the whole family

Foto: Anjuscka Pilz, Düsseldorf

The Grimm's fairy tale, "The Star Money" gives inspiration: Inspiration to face the adversities of life and still be there for others. The Sterntaler children's hospice in Dudenhofen near Speyer deliberately chose this name, because it wants to be an inspiration as well.

Most adults associate institutions such as hospices with a certain amount of anxiety. After all, a hospice reminds us of the finite nature of life. The care activities in a children's hospice, however, focus more on life and less on its impermanence. This begins, not with end-of-life care, but much earlier. For example, like the other children's hospices in Germany, the Sterntaler in-patient children's hospice in Dudenhofen (near Speyer) provides the entire family of a terminally ill child with the opportunity to recharge their batteries for up to four weeks a year. The staff at Sterntaler accompany families throughout the lengthy phase of the particular disease and also provide support during the death of the Sterntaler children as well as during the bereavement process.

The Sterntaler retreat is located in an old mill. Established in 2009, it is the first and only in-patient facility of its kind in Rhineland-Palatinate and in the densely populated Rhine-Neckar area. Initially, it offered three care spaces for children. This was not nearly enough, as the demand is so great. According to the Federal Children's Hospice Association e.V., there are approximately 40,000 children and young people with life-limiting illnesses living in Germany. About five thousand children, adolescents and young adults die from these types of diseases every year. Therefore, it is all the more significant that, after a



long planning and preparation phase, the Sterntaler offer has now been extended to include twelve spaces.

This means that up to twelve sick children can make use of the comprehensive services offered by the Sterntaler team with their parents and siblings. The children's hospice is staffed by qualified paediatric nurses as well as carers who are available to look after and give round-the-clock care to children with life-limiting illnesses.

All Sterntaler staff are distinguished by their quality education and willingness to engage in furthering their professional development. And they have yet

another characteristic: They pour their hearts and souls into their work. They are highly committed to the wellbeing of the guests in their charge. Particularly because this work can be emotionally exhausting, and most members of staff are also parents, it is very important to reduce the physical stress in the everyday care routine. Therefore, the twelve child care rooms, two bathrooms and a treatment room are equipped with Guldmann ceiling-mounted hoist and rail systems which are combined with GH1 and GH1 Q-lifting modules. These are designed for a lifting capacity of up to 205 kilograms and facilitate the lifting of sick children while relieving strain on the backs of the staff members.



Caregiving is carried out in consultation with the parents' wishes. They can provide all or part of the care, so that parents can recharge their batteries, get some distance from the stress of their daily lives, talk with other parents and calm down. This is most urgently needed, as they are in a constant state of stress. Caring for sick children, with the knowledge that they can only offer them limited help, brings parents face to face with their own physical and emotional limits. In the children's hospice, they now have time to do ordinary, everyday things like sleeping in, going to the movies or jogging together as a couple.

But it is not only the parents who experience special attention at the children's hospice. The Sterntaler staff also focus on the siblings. They have the opportunity to express their concerns and voice their needs in consultations with remedial teachers or social workers. There are also numerous recreational activities available. These might include stage plays, climbing, story times, or just time to be a child and frolic with other children and light-heartedly discover the world.

Of course, the Sterntaler team also accompanies the families during the final phase of the sick children's lives, assisting with counsel and support and serving as a source of strength. This can take place at the in-patient children's hospice or at home with the support of experienced nursing staff or palliative carers and voluntary family attendants. Most importantly, the service does not end with the final passing of the child. The individual grieving process is very important, and parents and siblings are afforded ample time to come to terms with the inconceivable.