



The Euro-Peds clinic, established in 1999, was the first intensive pediatric [physical therapy](#) clinic in the U.S. It was inspired by Michigan parents who had traveled to Poland so their daughter could have intensive therapy – they were so amazed by her improvement that they convinced the North Oakland Medical Centers (NOMC) to open a similar clinic in Pontiac, Michigan.

Euro-Peds combines the most effective practices from East European and Western therapies. They treat patients with [cerebral palsy](#), traumatic brain injuries, spina bifida, and many types of genetic and metabolic conditions. Their patients participate in a therapeutic “boot camp,” which entails therapy sessions lasting up to four hours each day.

They have treated patients from 45 different states and five different countries. For many of their patients, traveling to the clinic – not to mention temporary hotel lodging and the costs of the therapy itself – can put a financial strain on their families. The Euro-Peds Foundation (EPF) was established in 2013 to alleviate some of these difficulties.

On Friday, November 10th, the EPF hosted their third annual First-Step Gala to raise money so that more children can benefit from their program. The name of the gala comes from their motto, “Every child deserves a first step.” As explained during opening remarks at the event, the “first steps” their patients take vary greatly depending on their baseline abilities. For some, the “first step” may be learning to hold their heads upright so that they can more easily eat and interact with people around them. Others may literally take their first steps while at the Euro-Peds clinic. One patient learned to use a walker at the age of 10, and in a subsequent visit at the age of 20, began to walk with crutches. At the gala, he proudly demonstrated this skill onstage.

The Keynote speaker, Michigan Supreme Court Justice Richard Bernstein, discussed his own experiences living with a disability. Bernstein has been legally blind since birth, and also sustained serious injuries in 2012, after being hit by a speeding cyclist.



He told the audience that someone once told him that being unable to see facial expressions might prevent him from being a good judge. He adamantly disagrees with this, stressing that his struggles have made him more empathetic and fair.

Despite major setbacks after the 2012 accident, he has completed marathons, an Ironman competition, and a triathlon. He did note, however, that his goals changed after being injured. It became less about the time in which he finished, and more about finishing, period.

Bernstein's remarks tie into the idea that "first steps" can mean very different things depending on individual circumstances, but that doesn't make them any less life-changing.

To learn more about some Euro-Peds patients' first steps, click [here](#).

For more information about the Euro-Peds Foundation, and how you can help children to take their first steps, visit their website: <http://www.europedsfoundation.org/>

