



Ronald McDonald
House Charities®
Toronto

SPRING 2018

A place to call home

Manning's remarkable journey

How you helped



Our champion and visionary

Mary Pat Armstrong awarded Order of Canada



The RMHC Toronto story started with a phone call.

In late 1978, Mary Pat Armstrong picked up the receiver to hear her daughter's oncologist ask if she wanted to be part of trying to establish a Ronald McDonald House in Toronto.

The first Ronald McDonald House had opened in Philadelphia just four years prior, and leaders at McDonald's Canada, including founder George Cohon, now wanted to bring the concept to Canada: it would require a broad community effort.

"I had to take only a second to answer that question," recalls Mary Pat about her enthusiasm that day.

Mary Pat and her husband, Bob, had only recently lost their five-year-old daughter, Marion, to leukemia. It had been a difficult journey, but along the way, the Armstrongs had met many other families who were struggling as well.

Helping to establish RMHC Toronto turned out to be a "phenomenal way to grieve," says Mary Pat. "It was a way to turn our sad emotions into something far more positive."

Under Mary Pat's leadership as Chair of our inaugural Board of Directors, Canada's first Ronald McDonald House opened in Toronto – on Dundas Street – in April 1981.

Mary Pat later founded Camp Oochigeas for children with cancer in 1983. And in 2011, she was part of founding LIGHTS, a charity that assists individuals with an intellectual disability to live with a greater degree of independence.

"Mary Pat Armstrong laid the foundation for a powerful RMHC movement in Canada. The Order of Canada is a magnificent tribute to her past and ongoing efforts to make a difference." ~ Joe Cooper, past chair of the RMHC Toronto Board of Directors

Earlier this year, Mary Pat was awarded the Order of Canada, Canada's highest honour, for that entrepreneurial spirit and her 40-plus-year commitment to improving the lives of families of children with cancer and people with disabilities.



Our first Ronald McDonald House at 356 Dundas Street West had 19 bedrooms.



Journey Beads capture the family story

Hospitals have their bravery beads and courage beads, and now RMHC Toronto has Journey Beads.

Last month, families started collecting colourful beads through our Child Life Program to reflect their unique experiences at the House.

"Journey Beads fill a significant gap," says Kayla Slegers, Child Life Specialist at RMHC Toronto.



Everett and Zoey collected 14 inches of beads in just a few weeks.

"Siblings can collect them, children in treatment can collect them, and so can moms, dads and grandparents. The beads represent the story of the whole family's journey while they are away from home."

"Many families refer to their experiences caring for and supporting a seriously ill child as a 'journey', so the name 'Journey Beads' felt right," says Kayla.

Each string of beads starts with a child's or family member's name, and a bead that represents the House. Family members can then get a bead, for example, for attending an activity at the House, achieving a milestone or having a tough day. There are also beads for volunteering at the House or going on an outing into the city. Adults will receive a gold-sparkle bead if they take time out for some self-care, like a massage or mini-yoga session.

"Journey Beads are designed to mark the milestones and the achievements in a family's stay at the House. We want them to be a cheerful and memorable keepsake of their time here so they can share their RMHC Toronto story with family and friends when they get home."

Kayla also hopes the Journey Bead program – the first of its kind at a Ronald McDonald House in the world – will encourage both kids and adults to take advantage of the many programs and supports available at RMHC Toronto. Child Life, for example, focuses on easing children's anxiety and assisting all family members in coping with the stress of their situation.

Journey Beads are an example of the supportive programming that your donations make possible.



161 days with RMHC Toronto

Manning's remarkable journey



“Hope came through RMHC Toronto.”

After an unremarkable pregnancy, nothing could have prepared Jennifer and Jeff Anderson for what happened after the birth of their son, Manning, in September 2017.

Within days, the newborn started to exhibit signs of serious illness. By Oct. 5, he was being transported from hospital in Peterborough to Toronto.

“My stomach was topsy turvy, upside down,” recalls Jeff about that anxious ambulance ride. In Toronto, Manning was diagnosed with viral meningitis and his organs started to fail. His heart was in particularly bad shape. By Oct. 10, Manning's doctors advised the family to “get him baptized now if you need to get him baptized.”

And then, unexpectedly, things started to improve.

Manning began retaining less water. His hands and feet became less cold. He started to eat a bit.



"We had a feeling his heart was getting better," says Jennifer, and tests soon confirmed that. By December, doctors told the Andersons he was strong enough to be put on a wait list for a heart transplant.

On Dec. 18, Manning was discharged from the hospital and the family – which includes five-year-old daughter, Regan, and Jeff's mom, Janet – came to live at the House to wait. Patients on transplant wait lists must usually stay close to the hospital.

"Coming here blew my mind. The staff, the volunteers, the accommodations were more than anyone could ever ask for. The House became our second home," says Jeff.

74 nights in the Family Room

The Andersons used the Family Room at SickKids for more than two months before Manning was discharged in December.

The Family Room was Jeff's "reprieve" during this time, where he slept most nights, showered, ate breakfast, grabbed a coffee and shared meals brought by his family

and friends. Jeff says the Family Room is also where he found quiet time to "pray my son was going to be with me for another day.

"The staff and volunteers always had a smile on their face and a 'good morning'. There was a lot of care. That's for sure. Hope came through RMHC Toronto."

The Andersons enrolled Regan in the RMHC School, where she thrived, and began to take advantage of the many other support programs and services available at the House. They especially appreciated the opportunity to bond with other families going through similar circumstances.

"We are all in the same boat," says Jeff, "and it helped a lot to talk."

This March, the Andersons received their best news yet from the doctors. To everyone's surprise, Manning's heart had healed enough that he no longer needed to actively wait for a transplant. While he still may need one in the future, the Andersons got the go-ahead to return home to Peterborough as long as Manning comes back for regular tests on his heart.

"I'm happy to be home. But I'm also relieved to know that RMHC Toronto will be there for us if we need it again in the future," says Jeff.

Adds Jennifer, "When your child gets sick and there's nothing you can do about it, it's devastating. But RMHC Toronto allowed us to remain a family and focus on helping Manning get better. We wouldn't be where we are today without this place."



Why they give Milo's Miracle

When Milo Spahich was born with a heart defect last year, requiring his mom, Megan, and dad, Dave, to live at RMHC Toronto for more than a month, his cousins wanted to honour him.

They heard about "this wonderful place called RMHC Toronto," says Megan's sister, Lisa Kaminski, mom to Ethan, 10, Dylan, 9, and Kian, 7. "Megan and Dave told the kids how fortunate they were to only have to stay at the House for a few weeks, because there are families who have to stay for months and months."

That inspired the cousins to give back to Ronald McDonald House so other families have the same opportunity to be supported during their time of need.

The cousins, ranging in age from five to 10, have collected an astonishing \$17,150 and counting since that time! You could call it a miracle, or "Milo's Miracle," to be exact.

Here's how they did it:

- On Halloween, they asked for donations instead of candy.
- They created a custom fundraising page at MakeFunMatter.ca and handed out cards inviting people to donate online.

- They made a presentation to their school in Kincardine, Ont.
- They organized a silent auction and bake sale at a hockey game.
- They collected donations from local businesses and held raffles.

"We were really excited that the kids found a way to be involved in our journey," says Dave. "I can see how they've grown in a short amount of time. It's instilled empathy in them and changed their outlook."

Lisa agrees, "The learning they are getting out of this experience is amazing. They're so proud and plan to continue fundraising until Milo's first birthday in September. They talk a lot about how having family around you when you're sick helps you feel better, and that's what RMHC Toronto does."



Make Fun Matter

Whatever you do for fun this summer, make it matter to others. Hosting a fundraiser for RMHC Toronto is a great way to get your friends and family involved in supporting other families in need. Visit MakeFunMatter.ca to get ideas and learn how.

latest news



INTRODUCING JAYSON

RMHC Toronto is pleased to welcome Jayson Horner as the new Chair of our Board of Directors. Jayson is the Co-Founder, President and CEO of CanDeal, Canada's largest alternative trading system, and has spent more than 30 years

in the financial services sector. He first became involved with RMHC Toronto in 2007 and has served as our Board Vice Chair since 2016.

"RMHC Toronto is at an important stage of its evolution as we strive to support a growing number of families. I look forward to helping us expand our embrace," says Jayson.

2016-2017 ANNUAL REVIEW AVAILABLE

Learn how we're working hard to expand our embrace to support more families than ever before in this year's Annual Review.

Read it at www.rmhctoronto.ca/Annual-Review or contact us for a copy.



WHO LOVES RECESS?

Well, more than 1,700 people do. That's how many kids of all ages attended this second annual family-friendly fundraising event on March 25, 2018.

Revenues from *RECESS* were close to \$300,000, thanks to the attendees, our more than 200 volunteers, our presenting sponsor, Mars Wrigley Confectionery, and more than 25 other sponsors.

Spanning the entire floor and concession areas of Ryerson's Mattamy Athletic Centre, *RECESS* featured beach volleyball, virtual surfing, carpool karaoke, a midway, video games, life-sized Lego and great food. M&M characters, PAW Patrol, Stormtroopers and princesses all made special appearances, and media personalities,



Rick and Angie Campanelli, were our lively hosts.

Stay tuned for information about an even more exciting event in 2019.

To see the *RECESS* photo gallery, visit www.rmhctoronto.ca/RECESSphotos.

A SUMMER HIGHLIGHT

The buzz about our summer camp is already building among the kids who know they'll be spending July and August at RMHC Toronto. The RMHC Toronto Camp is an all-day, Monday to Friday, program for children staying at the House. It lets kids be kids and do just what they might normally do at home, which is go to camp. It also gives parents the gift of time – to care for their sick child in the hospital, run errands or simply to rest. Last year, 63 kids enrolled.



MCHAPPY DAY JUST KEEPS GETTING BETTER AND BETTER.

We can't wait to hear the total raised during this year's day-long fundraiser at McDonald's.

On May 2, 2018, \$1 from every Big Mac, Happy Meal and hot McCafé beverage purchased went to support Ronald McDonald Houses across the country, as well as other children's charities.

RMHC Toronto is tremendously grateful for this event. Support from McDonald's, our founding and forever partner, contributed significantly to our overall revenues last year and every year.

Thank you McDonald's!

How to help

Golf for a cause

More than 200 golfers will be gathering on the greens at King Valley Golf Club on Monday, **July 23, 2018** to support RMHC

Toronto. It's our 16th annual Charity Golf Classic. Some sponsorship opportunities are still available. Contact Kyla Brierley at kbrierley@rmhctoronto.ca to learn more.



Volunteer with us



RMHC Toronto runs in large part because of the commitment and compassion of our close to 500 volunteers. We are in particular need of volunteers to support activity programs at the House this summer and for our network of Family Rooms across the GTA and in Sudbury. Visit www.rmhctoronto.ca/volunteer to learn how you can make a difference in the lives of the families we support.

Our impact

Through our House and Family Rooms, **RMHC Toronto supports families** of children receiving care at about **9 hospitals** across the Greater Toronto Area

We served 18% more families in 2017 than the year before.



Thank you for giving generously.



**Ronald McDonald
House Charities®
Toronto**

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Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC) Toronto is an independent charity, governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. It operates under the legal name Toronto Children's Care Inc. Charitable Registration #11885 2631 RR0001

About this newsletter: A place to call home is produced two times a year to keep you informed about the impact of your support to RMHC Toronto. If you wish to be removed from our mailing list, please contact us at rmht@rmhctoronto.ca.

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