



Ronald McDonald
House Charities®
Toronto

HOLIDAY 2018

A place to call home



*Staying close to Isabella
Because of you*



Family App Wins International Award

Arriving at RMHC Toronto for the first time can feel a little overwhelming, especially if the big city is new to you.



That's one of the reasons we created "Virtual Front Desk" last year, a mobile app designed to introduce families to the House and neighbourhood and to make them feel at home. And this August, we were named the recipient of the top international award from the body representing more than 350 RMHC Houses around the world for creating the app.

Virtual Front Desk includes a calendar of activities at the House, a neighbourhood guide with real-time directions to local resources, FAQs, a House floor plan and staff directory.

Importantly, Virtual Front Desk also includes real-time broadcast messaging capabilities, allowing us to instantly send text notifications to families about, for example, tonight's dinner menu. It also has the ability to send personalized notifications, making it possible to, for example, send a message to a family member as they arrive at the House in the evening to wish them a good night's rest.

Developed in partnership with Flybits Inc., Virtual Front Desk is available for free download on the App Store and Google Play.



Introducing the RMHC Cookie



This fall, McDonald's began selling a new heart-shaped RMHC Cookie to support families at Ronald McDonald Houses and Family Rooms across Canada. For every cookie purchased every day, five cents will go towards supporting families with a seriously ill child. It will become a welcome new source of revenue for RMHC Toronto.

The inspiration for the RMHC Cookie comes from families like the Traffords from Melancthon, Ont.

Kris is the mom of 16-month-old Brody, Jade, 3, and Desmond, 5. This year, the family, including dad, Graham, spent 129 days at RMHC Toronto while Brody received treatment for a life-threatening intestinal disorder.

After long days at the hospital, Kris found she craved time in the kitchen, just like at home. When she first started baking at RMHC Toronto, she would leave a few dozen cookies out for other families to eat or take to the hospital the next day, but in no time, Kris found people would come to the kitchen to hang out together.

"It was just what I needed," she says. "I think a lot of us sometimes just want to hide in our room, but if there's a cookie smell downstairs, you get drawn out of your room and let go of that stress for a bit." It's like cookie therapy.



More than **700 families** have stayed at our House so far this year. Our Family Rooms have supported close to **4,000 families** since January.

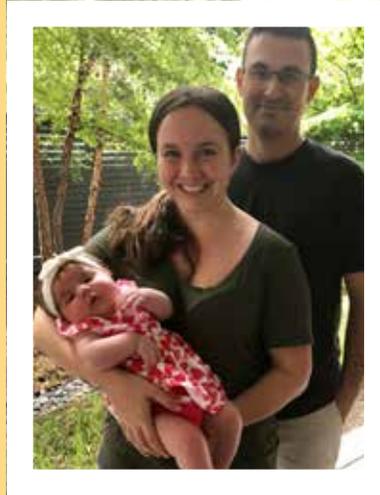
“Words cannot express how truly grateful we are. We will never forget how you gave us a safe haven to come home to. We appreciate everything and everyone.”

– Corrine Kirby, grandmother of Alyvia, 140 nights at RMHC Toronto and counting



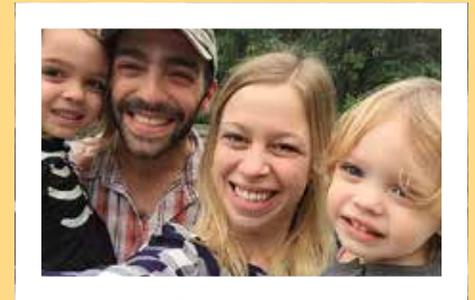
“As a mom, it was hard enough not being in the hospital room with her 24/7, so if I didn't have this place to be close to her, I couldn't imagine how much harder it would have been.”

– Samantha Audia, mom of Rosalie, 170 nights at RMHC Toronto



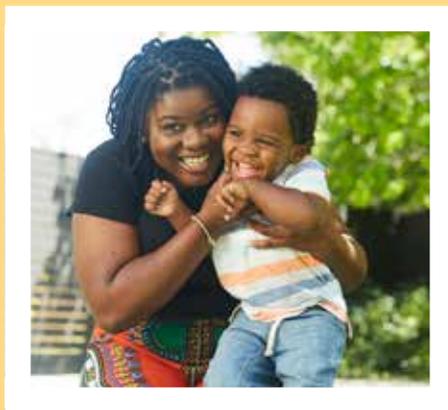
“Being together as a family while staying close to Nicolas means the world to us. By staying together at the House, we've all bonded so much more, especially Olivia and Amelia. They turn to each other for comfort and while they are with us, they know everything is going to be okay.”

– Stephanie Chaney, mother of Nicolas, 125 nights at RMHC Toronto and counting



Because of you...

Families say “thank you” the best



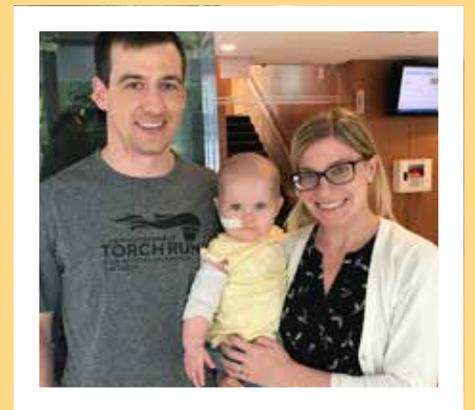
“My son has become a new child since coming to the House. He's developed his voice.”

– Gendlyne Smith, mother of Messiah, 333 days at the House and counting



“RMHC Toronto provided my family and me with a sense of normalcy which is all I could have really asked for during such a complicated time in my life.”

– Emma Collins, 18, 273 nights at RMHC Toronto



“You truly have thought of everything to try and ease the pain we are all facing. Everyone comes from different walks of life but when we're under the roof of RMHC, we're all family.”

– Joey Wilson, dad of Charlotte, 221 nights at RMHC Toronto



While Isabella grows strong Making the holidays happy

Isabella was supposed to be a Christmas baby. Instead, she unexpectedly came three months early.

Thanks to your support, the Triantafilou family has found a home at RMHC Toronto since late September while they wait for 'baby Bella' to get stronger and healthy enough to go home with them to Oshawa, Ont. Her hospital room is so close to the House that the family can actually see it lit up at night from their bedroom window.

Life with Isabella is "day by day", says Lisa, which is why the family is so grateful for RMHC Toronto.

"It's been a godsend in so many ways." And top of the list is that she and her husband, Peter, can stay close to their sons, Daniel, 4, and Nathan, 2, while they care for their newborn.

"Before Isabella's birth, I was with the boys 24/7. I couldn't imagine being away from them now."

"It's become a home away from home for us," says Peter.

The boys are active around the House – playing inside and out and participating in arts and crafts programs, comedy nights, teddy bear clinics and the Halloween party.

Lisa says the boys love going down to dinner in the evening because it's where they often meet their new friends. "They are growing up here, becoming more social, and learning to think about others."

As the family looks ahead to the holiday season, they know things will be different for their family. Christmas is a big event in their household. But, they are comforted to know RMHC Toronto has big plans to bring the festive spirit to the House. And inside the family's room at the House, they'll be hanging a third stocking this year labelled "Beautiful Baby Bella," looking forward to the day they can take her home in 2019.

"My favourite word for RMHC Toronto is 'amazing'," says Lisa. "I can't say it enough."



Daniel and Nathan this summer, before Isabella's unexpected early arrival.



A visit with Isabella

Living so close to the hospital makes it easy for Lisa and Peter to spend time with Isabella every day. She responds to visits from her big brothers just as much. Isabella perks up when Daniel and Nathan, enter her hospital room, says Lisa. "She is so alert. She knows their voices so well her eyes open wide." The boys love the visits too. "They talk to her and argue over what they are going to buy her when she gets home – a pink fire truck or Skye (the female character) from Paw Patrol."



The holidays here

RMHC Toronto brings the spirit of the holiday season to life for families every December.

Decorating starts on Dec. 1, with trees, garlands, lights and snowflakes. Throughout the month, there are almost daily activities for families, including ornament making, dessert baking and Christmas and Hannukah stories. Children write letters to Santa, and the big guy even makes a special early visit to the House so everyone can get their picture taken with him. On Christmas Eve, he returns to slide down our chimney and leave presents outside everyone's doors.

This year, we are also running a special five-day holiday camp so kids stay occupied while our School is closed.

Because families are going through a difficult time, we do our best to make the House a warm, comforting and magical place to be.

More than words

Tyler Dunk had to audition before becoming a volunteer this April.

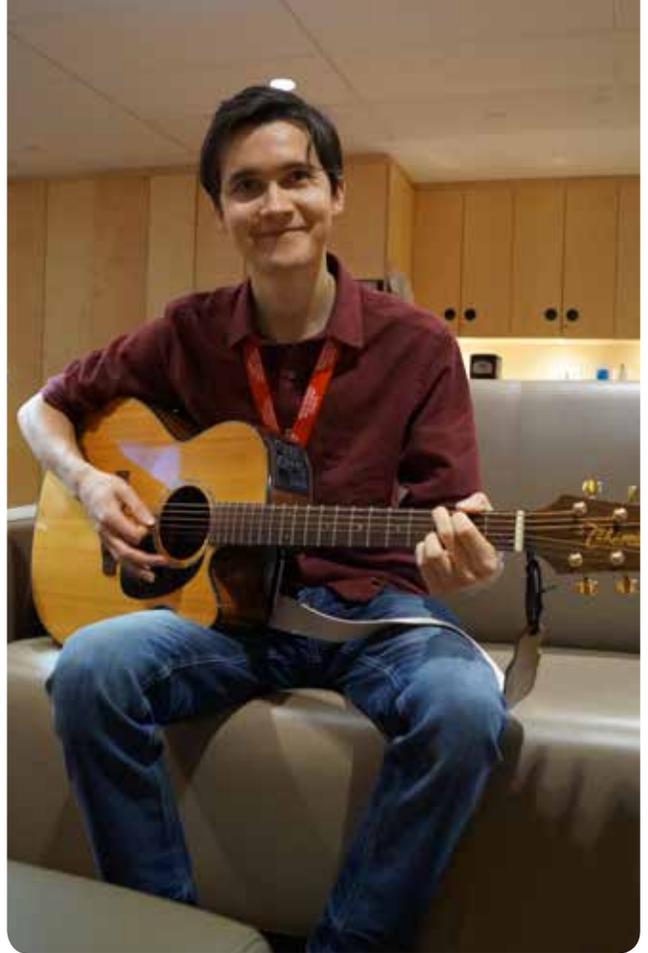
That's because the 26-year-old has a special role: he's a music relaxation volunteer in our Family Room at SickKids.

Every Wednesday from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Tyler pulls out his acoustic guitar, takes a seat in the centre of the Family Room and strums some calming and peaceful melodies for the families using the space.

RMHC Toronto created the role in the Family Room earlier this year after watching how families reacted to a dad who began playing his guitar in the space.

"It was very well received by other families, so we thought, why not turn it into a program," says Olivia Brammer, Family Room Coordinator.

"Music brings people together. It creates community and a supportive environment in the room."



Why I volunteer

It takes a lot more than a good golf swing to successfully organize a golf tournament. As a volunteer on the RMHC Toronto Golf Classic Committee since 2010, Carolyn Saunders, Senior Vice President, Global Customer Experience at Scotiabank, has helped the event

raise millions of dollars to keep families together and close to the care they need. It's a testament to her energy, her innovative ideas and her relentless efforts to introduce new people and sponsors to the important work of our organization.

Why did you first volunteer for RMHC Toronto?

Having played in the golf tournament in previous years, I was always moved by the family presentations at the event. I then had an opportunity to take a tour of the House. I remember feeling completely overwhelmed with emotion, seeing the families go about their day, feeling the weight of their struggles, but then also being surrounded by such an amazing facility filled with so much warmth and love. It truly left a mark.

What keeps you involved year after year?

I'm from a small town (Welland, Ont.) and I often think of all the families I know there who may need RMHC Toronto at some point in the future. The longer I've been involved with RMHC Toronto, the more I have come to know personally the families who have benefitted. Their gratitude is unwavering. I can feel the impact of our efforts in the stories they share.

If you wanted to convince others to volunteer for RMHC Toronto - in any capacity - what would you tell them?

Giving your time is absolutely rewarding. You'd truly be helping the world be a better place.

It's one of the reasons I recently joined the Development and Communications Committee at RMHC Toronto. I'm compelled to contribute more.

FOR MICHAEL

Why Britney fundraises

Britney Colussi wears her heart on her sleeve, and she isn't afraid to show it. Especially when it comes to her cousin, Michael.

"We're the same age and he used to live across the street from me, so we have a close connection," she says.

Michael, 24, was born with serious heart defects, is living with Down syndrome and has experienced severe nervous system complications meaning he can't walk, talk or eat on his own.

"When he was born, doctors said he wouldn't make it past his first birthday, so he's been fighting his whole life," she says.

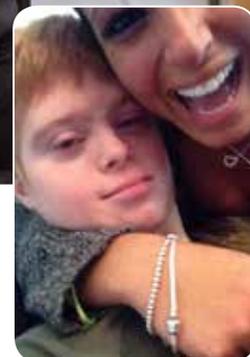
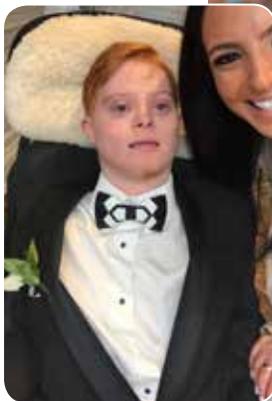
Britney has been there through the hard times in Michael's life.

"When I was 17-years-old, I was in the hospital room when Michael was revived. I stayed strong in the moment but in the waiting room I broke down. I looked up and saw a mother and daughter crying and I realized so many families are going through the same thing and experiencing the same pain."

After this experience, Britney was inspired to help other families with seriously ill children in Michael's honour.

In 2014, she became a RMHC Toronto volunteer. "I had the Saturday morning shift, which I loved, because I got to organize fun activities that families would be doing on a regular Saturday morning at home."

In November 2015, Britney began fundraising with a campaign called LivingStrongMD. Over three years, she



brought in an impressive \$31,000. And at a gala this October, she raised an incredible \$54,000 for RMHC Toronto and SickKids.

"I created LivingStrongMD to promote happiness and hope for families with seriously ill children. I used 'LivingStrong' because that's what Michael has done his whole life, and MD for his initials because he is the reason for everything I do.



"I didn't think I could plan a gala, but I knew I needed to live strong myself. The gala had 240 attendees, which is beyond what I imagined. It also raised awareness about the value of RMHC Toronto, which is important to me."

**MAKE
FUN
MATTER**

Make Fun Matter

Hosting a fundraiser for RMHC Toronto is a great way to get your family and friends involved in keeping families of seriously ill children close to each and to the care they need. Visit MakeFunMatter.ca to get easy tips and learn now.

Your donation supports



\$30 Holiday craft kits for kids



\$60 A cozy blanket and hot tea for the Family Room



\$100 Holiday dinner for a family of four



\$155 One night for one family



\$1,085 One week for one family

RECESS

a playful break for families



Experience the wonder of science, space and technology at this 3rd annual event.

Sunday March 24, 2019

11 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Heritage Court, Enecare Centre, Toronto

Early bird pricing until December 31!

Buy tickets at www.rmhctoronto.ca/RECESS

For information about corporate sponsorships, contact Kyla Brierley at kbrierley@rmhctoronto.ca.

65% of families live outside a city with a children's hospital.
That's why our House and Family Rooms are so needed.



Ronald McDonald House Charities®
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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 info@rmhctoronto.ca.

FOR POSITION OF
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