



Ronald McDonald
House Charities®
Toronto

HOLIDAY 2017

A place to call home

Keaton's first Christmas

The comfort and joy you bring

Why I give

Adam Altberg, with his wife, Barbara, and children, Matthew and Carly, have been supporting RMHC Toronto for more than 10 years. Most recently, they adopted two family bedrooms at the House, helping ensure families always have a place to stay when they need it.

What motivated you to support the organization?

Simple. Kids and their families. Their needs are real and immediate. Our family is so grateful we are in a position to make other families' lives easier when they are going through supremely difficult times.

Why did you introduce your children to RMHC Toronto?

As a family, we feel it is important to teach our children to give their time and money to charity when they can. We want them to see, feel, touch and learn what RMHC Toronto is about.

It also allows them to see how fortunate they are, that helping others makes a difference and that it feels good both for the donors and the families being helped.

You're a champion for RMHC Toronto. What do you say to people to convince them to get involved?

My wife jokes that I need to have a few Kleenex with me every time I go to the House. The House is full of love and comfort. People MUST go take a tour and see what it is all about. Trust my family, you won't be disappointed.



Giving SUPPORT

A volunteer's story

A few weeks ago, a father came up to Rochelle Miller in the RMHC Toronto Family Room at SickKids and said, **"I need a hug."**

It was a touching moment for Rochelle. She had gotten to know the dad during her previous volunteer shifts in the Family Room, and now he was reaching out for support on a particularly difficult day for his child.

The interaction with parents facing stressful situations is rewarding for Rochelle. She takes great pride in making the Family Room a peaceful place where families can relax, even if just for a few minutes.

As the wife of a McDonald's Owner/Operator, Rochelle has long admired the work of RMHC Toronto.

"I like to make it a secret den, a mom and dad cave. Parents are so overwhelmed at the hospital. It's genius to have this space for them."

And she had been active in fundraising for our organization too. But it wasn't until she retired from her nursing career that she was able to take the plunge into volunteering.

"The minute I stopped working, I said 'I'm coming to RMH,'" she recalls. Three and a half years later, she's still coming, every week, to help make the Family Room a place to call home for families with seriously ill children



56% of RMHC Toronto volunteers work in our Family Rooms.

in the hospital. Her commitment makes her one of our longest-serving Family Room volunteers.

"I'm a doer, so volunteering at the Family Room is right up my alley. I like the satisfaction I get when I leave the place a little better."

The Family Room at SickKids is the largest of the 7 Family Rooms operated by RMHC Toronto. We recruit volunteers for our Family Rooms and House year-round. Visit www.rmhctoronto.ca/volunteer to learn more.

Early bird pricing until Jan. 31!
Buy tickets at rmhctoronto.ca/RECESS

2nd Annual recess

a playful break for families

Come out and play!

Sunday, March 25, 2018 | 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Ryerson's Mattamy Athletic Centre, Toronto

For information about corporate sponsorships, contact Jennifer Jarvis at jj Jarvis@rmhctoronto.ca.

Comfort and Joy

Cabana family finds both here



Keaton Cabana's first Christmas is going to be extra special.

For the first time in his eight months, he is finally feeling healthy enough to stay awake for more than one hour at a time, to giggle and even to eat and drink.

Keaton received a new liver, donated by his courageous mother, Vanessa, just a few weeks ago.

"Before the transplant, getting Keaton to smile was like winning the lottery. Now he's full of smiles. He's playful, he's wide awake. He's a normal baby."



It's made him a new little man. Born in March 2017 with a disease called biliary atresia, doctors eventually determined that a liver transplant was his only chance at a healthy life. Thankfully, Vanessa's liver was found to be a perfect match.

From Fredericton, N.B., the Cabanas – Keaton, Vanessa and dad, Matthew – have been at RMHC Toronto since July. It's been a place of comfort and joy for the family throughout this time, both before and after the transplant.

"The staff and volunteers make you feel like they've known you your entire life. And we've met so many other great families," says Vanessa. "It's so powerful here."

"You wouldn't think you'd have joy in this House, but you do."

After weeks of shuttling between the House and family's bedsides, Matthew says his biggest moment of joy was "seeing my family come back to me here at the House" after the transplant. RMHC Toronto has become their home.



A magical holiday at RMHC Toronto

It's the "most wonderful time of the year," but it doesn't always feel that way for families with seriously ill children.

That's why staff and volunteers at RMHC Toronto do their best to bring festive spirit to our families during the holidays.

As soon as the calendar flips on Dec. 1, holiday elves (volunteers) descend upon the House and Family Rooms to decorate with snowflakes, lights, garlands and trees. The spaces are quickly transformed into winter wonderlands.

Once the scene is set, the fun begins! From photos with Santa to ornament making, Hanukkah stories to Christmas movies, RMHC Toronto is a great place to be for holiday fun. This year, we'll even be hosting an outdoor winter carnival, an opportunity for kids to (hopefully) frolic in the snow.

By the time Santa arrives on Christmas morning, we hope everyone we support – young and old – has felt the spirit of the season, surrounded by the people they love.

"This place changes you for the better," says Vanessa, "and I'm really going to miss it. Who would've imagined I would be sad when it comes time to go home?"

There is still "a long journey" ahead for Keaton, but his parents are counting down the days until their little man is fully healthy and happy. They're also counting their blessings.

"This House is so important," says Matthew. "Donors should know that they're doing a lot to help make an expensive city affordable for families like ours."

"What would we do without RMHC Toronto? This is the best place ever."





The Sisterhood of the Family Services Associates

Nicole Aversa, Ryley Stapleton and Leigh-Anne Onlock are a tight trio, bonded by the compassionate nature of their work and their close physical proximity.

"We're always bumping chairs," says Ryley, with a laugh. The three Family Services Associates (FSAs) at RMHC Toronto share two small offices between them, in the front entrance of the House. Their offices are a hub of activity, where they register new families, field questions from volunteers and greet children who stop by to chat. The quarters are tight, but close relationships have formed between those walls.



"Nicole has the best memory. We count on her for details we've forgotten."

"We read each other's minds and finish each other's sentences," says Nicole. Their familiarity has developed over many years. Ryley and Leigh-Anne have been working together since 2012, and Nicole joined the team in 2014. All three bring complementary strengths to their roles.

Their duties are wide-ranging and always very human, but their close contact with families is what the FSAs love most about their job.

"Having worked here for so long, we get to see children grow up," says Leigh-Anne. "We spend holidays together

and share milestone moments. How many first birthday parties have we helped plan?"



"Leigh-Anne has the best analytical mind."

"There are many families who send pictures or come back to see us because they consider us like family," says Nicole.

"We see families leaving with good news, and that's emotional. We see families leaving with bad news, and that's emotional as well," says Ryley.

"That's what is so great about our team: the support," says Leigh-Anne. "Whether we're dealing with our sadness together or separately, we always look out for each other and pick up the slack when needed."

It's their support for each other that enables them to support our families so well.

"It's rewarding to help families take care of themselves and offer some relief when they're probably the most stressed they've ever been in their lives. We're grateful for that opportunity every day."



"Ryley is our sense of calm. She's the most easygoing and helps us to keep things light."

Our Family Services team registered **837** new families last year.

latest news



COFFEE TALK FOR PARENTS | One of the many benefits of staying at RMHC Toronto is the opportunity for families to meet and make friends with each other. Their shared understanding of what it means to have

a seriously ill child offers them comfort and strength they can't easily find elsewhere.

To encourage these kinds of connections, RMHC Toronto recently launched a weekly program called Coffee Talk to give parents a chance to relax and socialize with each other while their children have supervised fun nearby.

"With all the stresses in their day, it helps to have one hour set aside to just enjoy a cup of coffee and some adult conversation," says Ami Armagost, Programs Coordinator.

Coffee Talk has been well attended, with up to 20 adults participating each night.

"The focus is on creating a casual, comfortable atmosphere so conversation can flow organically," says Kayla Slegers, Child Life Specialist. "We chat about anything and everything, from restaurants near the hospital to try to discussing the procedure their child had that day."

LONGER SCHOOL DAY | The RMHC Toronto School has been looking a lot different this year. In September, it began offering a full school day for students in Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8. Students start at 9 a.m. and finish at 3 p.m.

The extra time means teachers can cover more subjects – like French and Health – and have more time to cover core subjects like Math and Language. Students also have more



outdoor time, with a third recess now worked into the day.

Says Katie Doering, Principal, "We also use the additional time to focus on our students' social development and wellbeing.

"Historically, we've felt that patients couldn't manage a longer school day, but depending on their diagnosis and treatment schedule, we're realizing that many of them can. The return to normalcy is extremely important for their recovery and holistic development."

An average of 20 students has been attending each day, and parents seem pleased with the change. But there's one question they've been asking Katie quite regularly.

INTERNATIONAL AWARD | Since their start as McDonald's Owner/Operators in Ontario's York Region nine years ago, Marcia and Todd Finlayson have always had a soft spot for the families supported by RMHC Toronto. Now, their fundraising efforts for our families have been recognized with an international award.

The Finlaysons were awarded the Gerry Newman McTLC Award of Excellence by Ronald McDonald House Charities in November, becoming the first-ever Canadian recipients of the prestigious honour. What's more, they have decided to donate the US\$100,000 that comes with the award to RMHC Toronto.



The Finlaysons championed the opening of our Ronald McDonald Family Room at Markham Stouffville Hospital in 2013. Since then, they have harnessed the generosity of their community to ensure the operating costs of the Family Room have been met. On McHappy Day this year, they raised more than \$90,000 by engaging close to 100 local "McHappy Day Ambassadors" as in-restaurant VIPs.

"Making a difference is what drives us all," say the Finlaysons. "Our greatest hope is that our Ambassador Program will inspire other communities and other Owner/Operators across the country."



"How much does this cost?' Parents can't believe we provide this school experience at no cost to them. Donors should know what a huge relief that is for families."

How to help

Family Tree

MONTHLY GIVING PROGRAM

Become a Monthly Donor

Joining our Family Tree Monthly Giving Program is an excellent way for you to support our families year round. When you become a monthly donor, you help us reduce costs for postage, paper and printing, which means more of your dollars go directly to helping families. Thanks to a generous donor this year, your donation in December will be matched! Visit www.rmhctoronto.ca/donate-monthly.

Adopt A Week

Looking for a meaningful opportunity to engage your company while giving back? Consider adopting a week at RMHC Toronto. You will create a week of healthy, tasty food and fun activities for our families. Contact Jen Jarvis at jjarvis@rmhctoronto.ca to discuss an Adopt-A-Week donation or visit www.rmhctoronto.ca/Adopt-A-Week.

Families *you've touched*

Every **100 minutes** last year,
a new family in need of support
arrived on one of our doorsteps.

837 families stayed at the House

4,255 families
used one of
our 7 Family
Rooms

Thank you.



RMHC Toronto relies **100%** on donors like you.
We receive **no government** funding.



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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.

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