



Ronald McDonald
House Charities®
of Connecticut &
Western Massachusetts

From the Heart

Stories of how you keep families together when it matters most

Fall 2020

Providing Support When It's Needed Most Yasmin and Yamil's Journey

From an emergency C-section at just 22 weeks pregnant, to the arrival of a global health pandemic, and 8 months of ups and downs as her son, Yamil, fought to grow stronger, Yasmin shares how the Ronald McDonald House has been there through it all.



A Community of Resilience and Courage

The past six months have presented new challenges for us all. In many ways, it gave us all a glimpse into the daily challenges families with a sick child typically face. In this issue of *From the Heart*, you will read firsthand how the strength and commitment of donors can provide resiliency and courage to families staying with Ronald McDonald House of Connecticut and Ronald McDonald House of Springfield.

In the pages ahead, Yasmin describes her journey with her son, Yamil over the past eight months. Yasmin has taught us the true meaning of resilience; fighting alongside her son while he received lifesaving medical treatment during a pandemic and turning to Ronald McDonald House for a comforting home.

And not once, but twice, Christina and Gkarik traveled from Cyprus so their daughter, Valeria, could receive critical medical care. They courageously left the support of friends and family, and found comfort, community and family at RMH during Valeria's recovery.

Donors Rudy and Sally Ruggles are keeping families and staff at Ronald McDonald House Charities safe with personal protective equipment. Their commitment is enabling us to continue our mission within our programs, with our partner hospitals and the overall community.

Our volunteers swiftly adapted to the new ways our Houses have needed support. From catering meals, to outdoor clean up and supporting our virtual events, our volunteers have been ready and willing to give of their time and talents.

Together, we are a community. Facing new challenges as a team, we are able to keep families safe, near the care they need, focused on the health of their ill children. As long as families need us, we need you!

With gratitude,



Michelle D'Amore, Executive Director



Michelle receives a check presented by the Crane Fund to support children and families.



Buy a Mask, Give a Mask

The health and well-being of our guest families, staff and community will always be our top priority. Therefore, we are excited to offer a unique way to support families through the purchase of one-of-a-kind facemasks. When you purchase a RMHC CTMA logo facemask, you will help provide RMHC CTMA families with medical-grade facemasks.

- \$10 per facemask, high-quality black facemask
- 100% cotton with three layers of fabric
- Washable and reusable
- Features a screen-printed RMHC CTMA logo

To view and purchase your RMHC CTMA facemask, visit rmhc-ctma.org.

Yasmin & Yamil's Journey

Yasmin was only 22 weeks along in her pregnancy when she underwent an emergency C-section. Her son, Yamil, was born more than four months early and weighed only 1lb, 2 ounces. "While I was pregnant, I imagined seeing my son at 40 weeks, fully grown and healthy. That's what I hoped for. I never imagined this. He was so small, he fit in my hand," reflected Yasmin.

Fast forward, nearly eight months and Yamil weighs 11lbs, 8 ounces and is pushing through each day with his mom Yasmin by his side. After her son was born, Yasmin spent several days in the hospital as a patient recovering from her surgery. She was able to move into her son's room and recover with him for a period of time. That's when a hospital social worker spoke with her about staying at the Ronald McDonald House.

"I'm very grateful," shares Yasmin. "Truly, I'm so very grateful because if I didn't have the House as a resource, I would have been traveling back and forth, which would have been so difficult. I probably would have tried to stay at the Hospital, but that's not the same as staying here. It would have been hard. The House has made everything so much easier for me. In a time of sadness and much difficulty, the House was there."

Over the past eight months, Yasmin and Yamil have gone through many ups and downs. As with many premature infants, Yamil's lungs were not fully developed at birth and he needed a ventilator to breathe. He underwent open heart surgery and is currently being monitored for ROP, a condition that can lead to blindness. While navigating her son's medical journey, Yasmin has also dealt with the added stress of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Thankfully, the health crisis has had little to no effect on her son's condition. It has, however, greatly affected Yasmin. "What's really been affected by it all is my mental health. Before, my family was able to come visit us. Then the virus started and now no one can visit. I am very isolated as a result and it has really affected me."

Yasmin, along with other families at the House, has shown us the importance of having the Ronald McDonald House community to help overcome the many challenges of the pandemic. She has leaned on the staff and families at the House for support and comfort. In fact, she shared one of her fondest memories to date. "My favorite moment was arriving at the house and seeing Rosy, who is a friend from Puerto Rico. We've known each other since childhood. To reconnect with her here in the house was really special. And everyone has been so kind to me. I've met so many good people here. Some have come and gone during my time here, but yes, so many good people."

No matter the circumstances, Ronald McDonald House will continue to provide families, like Yasmin's, a "home away from home" through their difficult journey.



Donor Spotlight: Sally & Rudy Ruggles

Sally and Rudy Ruggles truly understand the importance of philanthropy. Not only do they make a significant impact on the families of Ronald McDonald House Charities of Connecticut and Western Massachusetts, but also in their community.

Rudy first got involved with Ronald McDonald House of Connecticut at a signature fundraising event and was interested in learning more about the RMH mission and the critical need to build a new House. He said, "Send me a proposal and I will see what I can do to help." This simple offer led to the first generous gift from Sally and Rudy to support the Capital Campaign in 2016. The Ruggles funded one of the four sunrooms in the House, providing families a special place of warmth to unwind from the challenges and uncertainties that each day brings with having a sick child at the hospital.



Sally and Rudy Ruggles (center) visit RMH of Connecticut for a tour and update from staff.

Sally and Rudy visited the new House and saw firsthand the impact of their generosity. Consummate philanthropists, they wanted to do more to help. They generously continued their support for two new initiatives in 2019: the Respite Program and a new Family Registry. The Respite Program allows families to utilize the House while their child is at the hospital for a short-term procedure, checkup, treatment or a routine appointment. Families can refresh and revitalize to help prepare for the challenges ahead. The Family Registry replaced an antiquated registration system for checking in families at both Houses. This new technology has streamlined our registration process and provides additional information so that we can better connect and engage with past guest families.

This year, as the pandemic presented us with new challenges in being able to provide a safe, family-centered environment to support families, the Ruggles reached out yet again to offer their support. Sally and Rudy understood the critical need and the added expense of purchasing and providing PPE, disinfectants, masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, gowns and other items necessary to ensure the health and well-being of families and staff. Their most recent gift ensures guest families, volunteers, and staff have daily PPE and each of the Houses remain stocked with top-quality cleaning supplies.

Both Sally and Rudy have had robust careers and an impact on their communities. Sally was the original owner of Books on the Common, Ridgefield's independent bookstore, where she nurtured the love of books and reading with her customers. Rudy began his career as a physicist with IBM before starting a career in intelligence and national security affairs in the U.S. and abroad. He was President of the Hudson Institute. Rudy also served on the Board of Danbury Hospital where he was recently honored for his quest to establish a state-of-the-art research program there by the naming of the new Rudy L. Ruggles Biomedical Institute. He is currently an adjunct Professor in the Genomic Medicine section of the J. Craig Venter Institute and member of the JCVI Board of Trustees.

We deeply appreciate all the ways Sally and Rudy Ruggles have supported our organization. We are forever grateful for their friendship. Thank you, Sally and Rudy!



A Place to Call Home, Twice!

Families come to our Ronald McDonald Houses from throughout Connecticut and Western Massachusetts, as well as from other states and even other countries. Some families need our home for just a few nights, while others need to stay for several months. Whatever the need, the House is there for them, to care for the entire family.

Valeria and her parents, Christina and Gkarik, have called our Ronald McDonald House their home on two occasions! First in 2018 and then again in 2019, Valeria and her family traveled all the way from Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean, for her surgeries. On both occasions, the House was their respite as she recovered.

"My child still remembers our days spent there and how much fun she had, despite the fact that she was recovering after an operation," shared mom, Christina. "Wonderful rooms and all the amenities. The staff are the kindest people, ready to help at any moment. We were very happy, because we stayed at the best house...Ronald McDonald House!"



Mini-fridges and Microwaves Provide for Social Distancing at Meal Time

For families that want even more convenience and a little more social distancing, we have equipped each guest room with a microwave and mini-refrigerator, stocked with healthy snacks, ready to go meals and beverages. Our goal is to ensure all our families can refuel and take time to eat together in whatever space they are most comfortable.

Our community kitchens are also available for use day and night and are rigorously cleaned and sanitized on a regular basis.

You can help provide families their favorite meals and snacks with an in-kind donation! Here are a few ideas:

- ◆ Bite size cheese snacks
- ◆ Juice boxes
- ◆ Trail mix
- ◆ Tuna creation pouches
- ◆ Easy mac
- ◆ Fruit cups
- ◆ Individual pasta or ravioli meals
- ◆ Peanut butter (single serve)



Volunteering is a Work of Heart

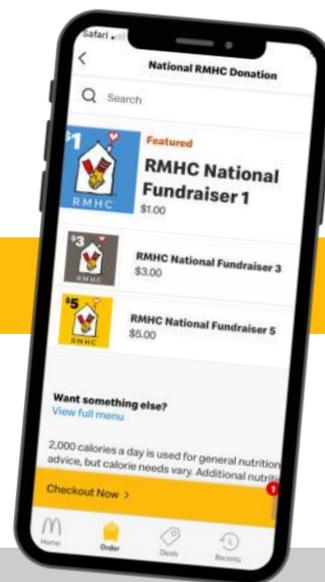
Volunteers find new meaning in supporting Ronald McDonald House families. Volunteers are the heart of our Houses and embody our mission to care for families. When the pandemic changed our day-to-day operations, volunteers never wavered in their service or ingenuity to create new opportunities. Many office volunteers switched to donating catered meals, outdoor clean up or collecting wish list items. Volunteers rolled up their sleeves and took advantage of the quiet Houses to clean closets, cabinets and pantries. Gift bags were made and delivered to families staying within the hospitals that could not leave to use our services. Volunteers supported our virtual events and helped deliver meals during our Dine & Donate Fundraiser. Together, they inspired staff with their dedication. Our gratitude can only be matched by the size of our volunteers' hearts.

Interested in volunteering?

Visit us at www.rmhc-ctma.org/get-involved/volunteer/ to learn more!

Order a "Side of Hope" in the McDonald's Mobile App

There's a new menu item on the McDonald's app! Now you can add a \$1, \$3 or \$5 RMHC donation to your mobile order to benefit RMHC CTMA children and families. Available at participating restaurants. Add a "side of hope" to your next order!



Planned Giving Advisory Committee: Thinking about your estate plans?

The Ronald McDonald House of Springfield has formed a Planned Giving Advisory Committee. The mission of the Planned Giving Advisory Committee is to establish a program that will serve to endow, enhance and support the services and programs of the Springfield House through its donors and the community. The committee is energetic and enthusiastic in its goals and will be sponsoring an educational seminar for attorneys, accountants, wealth managers and other financial professionals. It will also host a Zoom event to introduce donors to the basics of planned giving and how you can leave a lasting legacy. Go to our website rmhc-ctma.org to learn more.

Members of the Committee: Jennifer A. Rymarski, Esq. (Morrison Mahoney, LLP), Chair; Stefan R. Sjoberg, Esq. (Doherty Wallace, Pillsbury & Murphy, PC); Damon Accardi, Vice President (The Accardi Financial Group); Julie A. Dialessi-Lafley, Esq. (Bacon Wilson, PC); Joseph Conlan, Financial Advisor (Parent Financial Group); Robert M. Grenus, RFC, Financial Advisor (Integrated Financial Partners); Siobhan G. Matty AIF, AAMS, Assistant Vice President, Financial Advisor (St. Germain Investment Management); Dylan Pilon Owner Operator (Cloud g Marketing Group, LLC) and Marianne S. Fresia CTFA, Vice President Private Banking & Trust Services (Lee Bank)

GET TO KNOW: Madison, RMH Teen Board Member

Madison, better known as Maddie, joined the Ronald McDonald House of Connecticut Teen Board in 2018. During the 2019-2020 year, Maddie got creative and raised over \$4,000 to support the House, through the sale of hand-made greeting cards and by spreading awareness of RMHC with friends and family. She is beginning her 3rd year serving as a member and is an inspiration to young people looking to make a difference.

What are some of your hobbies?

Some of my hobbies are volleyball, playing the piano, and painting!

What motivates you to continue to serve on the Teen Board?

I want to bring more of my ideas to the Teen Board to support the families and it's a unique experience to collaborate with a diverse group of people.

What do you want to be when you're older?

After high school, I plan to go to college to pursue a career in the public health field. I want to formulate policies to mitigate the barriers marginalized communities in cities face in accessing equal health care.

What makes you the happiest?

I'm happiest when I'm spending time with my friends!

To view and order Maddie's hand-made greeting cards benefitting RMH families, visit her website, www.poliecards.com/.



Interested in joining the Teen Board at the Ronald McDonald House of Connecticut or Ronald McDonald House of Springfield? If you are a Sophomore, Junior or Senior in high school in Connecticut or Western Massachusetts you can apply!

Antonnique Robinson - Connecticut House
arobinson@rmh-ct.org

Enix Zavala - Springfield House
enix@rmhc-wma.org





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 **DONATE**

Your heartfelt contribution today allows us the flexibility to support our families in the ways they need it most. Together, we will keep families safe and close to the medical care they need. Visit our website to donate today!

rmhc-ctma.org



Virtual Trees of Hope

December 5 - 13, 2020

- Nine-day virtual event.
- No registration required. Simply visit our website www.rmhc-ctma.org to view displays & purchase raffle tickets online.
- Raffle tickets sold for \$1 each online; Over 85,000 raffle tickets sold annually!
- Each display is raffled off to one lucky winner at the conclusion of the event.

Trees of Hope is instrumental in securing the funds necessary to support the families at Ronald McDonald House of Connecticut. Until it is safe to be together again, help us spread joy and holiday cheer virtually through the Virtual Trees of Hope!