



Ronald McDonald
House Charities®
of Connecticut &
Western Massachusetts

From the Heart

Fall 2023

Stories of how you keep families together when it matters most



What is Your 'Why'?

2023 has been a busy year for RMHC CTMA. Our Houses are buzzing with fundraising events, volunteer activities, and families enjoying all the comforts of home that our Ronald McDonald Houses offer them.

This summer, members of our Senior Leadership team had the opportunity to attend the Conference of the Americas held by RMHC Global in Chicago. It was an opportunity to connect with our counterparts throughout the system and gain important learnings that will enhance our work with families, volunteers, and donors. Throughout our three days in Chicago, we were asked, "What is your 'why' for working for RMHC?"

I reflected on this question often throughout the conference. Every day, for the last five years in my role at RMHC CTMA, my heart has been filled by seeing the impact that we make on the families and children who need our services.

In this issue of "From the Heart", the Marrara family shares just how important our House was to them while their newborn twins, Luke and Madeline, were treated in the NICU. Their story is a touching example of exactly how critical our work is. Also in this issue, we have the opportunity to learn 'why' some of our volunteers spend their time ensuring families are provided compassionate care, daily necessities, and so much more. We also celebrate the efforts that our McDonald's partners give to our Houses.

The Marrara family, and each of the hundreds of families that we serve each year, are my 'why'. To have the opportunity to experience the impact that RMHC CTMA has on families, and to celebrate the generous volunteers, donors, and staff who support our mission, is my motivation each day.

As you read this issue of "From the Heart," I invite you to consider your 'why' for supporting RMHC CTMA. Thank you for all you do to provide care, comfort, and kindness to RMHC CTMA families. As long as they need us, we need you.

With gratitude,



Michelle D'Amore
Chief Executive Officer



RMHC CTMA Senior Leaders in Chicago for
RMHC Global Conference of the Americas.

Looking to impact RMHC CTMA families for years to come?

Consider giving a planned gift that will leave a legacy of care, comfort, and kindness to families today, tomorrow, and far into the future.

- Cash
- Appreciated Securities
- Donor Advised Funds
- IRA Charitable Rollover
- A Gift in your Will or Trust
- Retirement Plan Assets
- Charitable Gift Annuities
- Charitable Remainder Trusts
- Life Insurance



Visit www.rmhcpghome/?ctm to learn more



The Marrara Family

The Diagnosis

Tiffany Marrara was 10 weeks pregnant with twins when she received a call from her doctor asking if her husband, Nicholas, had ever had a blood screening for Kell antigens. While some blood antigens will only deplete blood cell counts, Kell antigens travel into bone marrow and impact blood cell production at its source. The doctor told Tiffany that Kell antigens were found in her bloodwork and if they were also present in Nicholas' screening, their babies would be at risk for developing anemia and possible heart failure.

A few weeks later, the twins were showing symptoms of anemia. Tiffany's pregnancy suddenly became very complex. She was carrying two babies who had a rare blood condition, and one of them was positioned in such a way that intervention would be very difficult. Tiffany's doctors were very concerned about the babies' situation as they would need to undergo transfusions while in utero.

Tiffany and the twins underwent their first transfusion at 22 weeks with great success. Doctors planned to transfuse every two to three weeks until the babies were strong enough to be delivered.

At 27 weeks, one of the twins, Luke, began to develop complications that made transfusions difficult. At 28 weeks, Tiffany and Nicholas were told that they would need to make a choice if their next transfusion failed – if they did not deliver the babies prematurely via an emergency c-section, Luke would likely pass away due to fetal heart failure from anemia.



Luke and Maddie together in the NICU.



To Tiffany and Nicholas, there was no question as to what to do. Luke and his sister, Maddie, were born at only 28 weeks gestation.

Luke soon underwent an external blood transfer, where all of the blood in his body was replaced with twice as much new blood in order to clear out the antigens. After 48 hours, Luke and Maddie were doing well and impressing their care teams.

The Dilemma

With the twins delivered and expected to be in the hospital for some months to come, the Marraras needed to figure out their next steps. Their commute to the hospital was over an hour in each direction. They also had three older children to care for and a feeling of familiarity and comfort at home. They were unsure about what to do.

"After the first week of commuting, we realized we needed at least one of us to be closer," Tiffany said.

Tiffany with Luke and Maddie.

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Donor Spotlight: Our McDonald's Family



Owner Operators, Managers, Crews, and Employees of McDonald's Corporate volunteering, fundraising, and donating to help the families of RMHC CTMA.

We believe the Owner Operators, managers, and crew members of our local McDonald's restaurants, Corporate employees, and associated vendors are our McFamily.

They embrace our mission and incorporate raising awareness and fundraising for RMHC in the way they do business every day. McFamily members step it up a notch and bring their support and compassion of RMHC families to the forefront of their daily activities and help customers donate and give hope, kindness, and compassion to RMHC CTMA families. They support our families 365 days a year through the donation box program, Round-Up for RMHC, and donations for every Happy Meal sold. Annually, they raise additional funds through special in-restaurant campaigns such as Give A Little LOVE where customers can donate \$1, \$3 or \$5 directly to RMHC CTMA and by donating \$0.25 for every Shamrock Shake sold during a special week in March. They played an essential role in building our Ronald McDonald House of Connecticut by donating both individually and collectively as business owners.

They also get hands-on outside of their work hours by coming directly to our Houses to donate and cook meals for families, collect wish list items families use daily, decorate and celebrate special occasions and holidays, and beautify our Houses inside and outside by cleaning and landscaping.

Our McFamily proudly supports all our special events by providing sponsorship dollars, attending, and volunteering to help ensure the events run smoothly and are a huge success. They bring warm smiles, interact with our guests, and help us raise as much money possible through raffles and contests held on site.

Each McFamily member is an ambassador for RMHC CTMA in their own way. Whether it is working behind the scenes to introduce and connect us to their business partners, lending support and insight to ensure fundraising campaigns are a success, or asking customers to Round-Up for RMHC when they take an order, everyone is dedicated to the same idea - giving care and support to the children that rely on RMHC CTMA to provide a home where they can be with their family while receiving the medical care they need.

Round-Up for RMHC!

Round-Up for RMHC is an easy and impactful way to help the families that call our Ronald McDonald Houses their home! By visiting your local McDonald's and agreeing to increase the total of your bill up to the nearest dollar, your donated small change can make a big impact.

Did you know?

The average Round-Up transaction in CT & Western MA is \$0.42! However, when multiplied several times a day across all the McDonald's restaurants in our area, these funds equate to over 385 nights of care, comfort, and kindness provided to families annually.

How does it work?

It's easy! When you visit your local McDonald's and place your order, you will be asked to Round-Up for RMHC. All you have to do is say YES and your bill will be increase to the nearest dollar. The increased amount is given to RMHC to provide meals, daily necessities, and all the compassionate support our families require.

Whether you order at the drive thru or front counter, the process is simple: Your order taker will ask you if you wish to Round-Up for RMHC before completing your food request. You reply "Yes, please!" If they do not ask at this time, you can say "I'd like to Round-Up for RMHC today!"

At the lobby kiosks, once you choose your items and go to the check out screen, you will be asked if you would like to Round-Up for RMHC. Just push the button to agree.

Why it matters

Every child deserves to receive the medical care they require no matter how far from their home it may be. Children also need to have their parents by their side during this intense and overwhelming process. Round-Up for RMHC is a small yet powerful way you can ensure that children have their families right by their sides as they face their medical battles head on.

Every time you Round-Up for RMHC, you will donate anywhere from \$0.01 - \$0.99. Knowing that small amount is making sure BIG things happen is priceless.

**Round-Up for RMHC
during your
next visit!**



A Project of Compassion

RMHC CTMA had the opportunity to create new videos to raise awareness of our organization and to celebrate everything that happens in our House to bring our mission to life. Thanks to a generous gift from the Rudy Ruggles Family Foundation, we partnered with StoryReal Studios and Karas & Co. Marketing for this project. The energy, passion, and dedication they brought to capturing stories was incredible. Their work brings to life the human element behind everything that happens within our Houses and provides moving on-screen moments that tell stories of hope, compassion, and generosity.

Each team member embraced the opportunity to get to know our families and volunteers and become a part of our RMHC family. We were moved by hearing what RMHC CTMA means to them and their reasons "WHY" they embraced this project.

Luke, StoryReal Studios

I chose to work with Ronald McDonald House because through film, we can uncover a lot of emotion and human connection and this is an organization where that is super apparent. We'll take out our cameras and we will be catching smiles, laughter from real families who stay in the House. That is something you don't get to see on every shoot. So being able to be here and be part of telling that story of showing what happens in the House to other people is a driving force. At the end of the day at Storyreal Studios, we want to use videos as a vehicle to make the world a better place to make people more connected to each other and help people empathize with the shared human experience.



Luke Adams and Isaiah John

Isaiah, StoryReal Studios

Working with the RMHC has allowed me to feel like I'm contributing to a greater cause. Seeing charities on TV isn't the same as seeing people in person who are actually helping those in need. It's very fulfilling to capture all the hard work that the volunteers put in to make people feel welcome and it has truly been an eye opening experience.

Tom & Alexa, Karas & Co. Marketing

Over the past decade, RMHC has shown us in every capacity what unconditional love is. From starting as a volunteer in college, cooking homemade meals in the kitchen, and connecting with families, each visit has shown us how much love goes into the mission. This year, our team had the opportunity to capture many of the great memories and testimonials of the families that have stayed in their homes. We were honored to be able to listen to their stories and open up about their experiences, so more people can learn about RMHC. This organization has made as much of an impact on our lives as we hope we've made at the houses in CT and Western MA.



Keith Dixon, Tom Karas, Alexa Orban, and Luke Adams

Keith, Freelance cinematographer

It was an incredibly special experience to work with RMH and help tell the stories of both the families that receive support and the staff who work tirelessly to care and provide for these families. Each story was so personal and profound, I am so glad I was able to play a part in spreading the word about such a wonderful community of givers.

Go to our YouTube channel, RMHC of CT & Western MA, to watch our new videos!

The Marrara Family, continued

The Answer

"At first, I was hesitant, not wanting to leave the older kids and my husband for days at a time and losing the comforts of home after such a traumatic few days. It was difficult to think about being in a different place over an hour from my home in a city where I didn't know anyone.

We needed to be close by, especially once the twins were bigger and needed us more and more. We decided to try the Ronald McDonald House. I didn't know what to expect but once I saw my room, personal bathroom, the kitchen and dining areas, I felt completely at ease. "This place is beautiful", I thought to myself! It was quiet and calm, exactly what I needed to rest and re-energize before crossing the street each day to spend time with and support the twins in their journey.

"The Ronald McDonald House made it so I didn't have to spend more time traveling than with the twins. The House allowed me to have all the essentials I needed - food, snacks, water, a bed to sleep in! The House gave me friendly faces who cared about what I was going through and offered an ear to listen, a smile of comfort, and a place to rest. We are so thankful for the reduction of stress, peace of mind, and assistance that the Ronald McDonald House has given us. The Ronald McDonald House you read about on the restaurant donation box means so much more than it did before! We are so thankful for the House and what it did to help our family heal!"



Tiffany, Luke, and Maddie celebrate going home after 68 nights!

"Thank you Ronald McDonald House for helping this Mama and her family in the greatest challenge of her life!" -Tiffany Marrara

DOUBLE the Love

November 1 – December 31



Your end of year gift will be matched dollar for dollar and help twice as many families!





**Ronald McDonald
House Charities®**
of Connecticut &
Western Massachusetts

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Did you know ?

You can support RMHC families
right from your smartphone!



**3rd Annual
Trees of Hope.**

NOVEMBER 4-17, 2023
150 WHITING FARMS RD, HOLYOKE, MA

HALFWAY TO HOPE RECEPTION
NOVEMBER 9, 2023

BENEFITTING
RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE
OF SPRINGFIELD

PRESENTED BY **GARYROME
HYUNDAI**

**34th Annual
Trees of Hope**

December 2-10, 2023
555 Long Wharf Dr
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Benefitting
Ronald McDonald House
of Connecticut