



Ronald McDonald
House Charities®
of Connecticut &
Western Massachusetts

Winter 2024

From the Heart

Stories of how you keep families together when it matters most



The Patterson Family

Love Knows No Bounds The Patterson Family's Story of Hope

860 Howard Avenue, Suite A, New Haven, CT 06519 T: 203. 777. 5683 www.rmhc-ctma.org

Expanding Our Mission, Together

RMHC CTMA has hit the ground running in 2024, thanks to all the support our donors, volunteers, and staff provided in 2023. Thanks to you, we were able to provide 7,196 nights of comfort to 380 families, saving them over \$2,158,800 in lodging and meal expenses and allowing them to focus wholly on caring for their critically ill children. Families felt welcomed and cared for during their stays by our 1,718 volunteers who donated 6,220 meals and 9,844 total hours of service to our Houses.

In 2024, we are looking forward to many new developments for our organization. We are filled with anticipation for the exciting new projects that will enhance and expand our ability to serve and positively impact families.

In New Haven, our Connecticut House will undergo an expansion campaign, adding 11 rooms to the House. This will allow more families to stay with us during their child's care.

In Springfield, our House will be revitalized with a new roof and new outdoor space, including an accessible playscape and shaded outdoor area for families.

These projects will be a massive undertaking for RMHC CTMA and will allow us to expand the reach of our mission and the impact that we can provide to families and children. This expansion will give you, our friends and contributors, more opportunities to support families, new ways to get involved, and new ways to live out our mission.

We are excited to share more with you as the year progresses. Thank you for your continued support of our families and your passion for the mission of RMHC CTMA. As long as they need us, we need you!

With gratitude,



Michelle D'Amore
Chief Executive Officer



Michelle and Gil Simmons during the 2023 CT Trees of Hope event where Gil was honored for his service and dedication to the RMHC CTMA mission.

Thank you for making the 2023 DOUBLE the Love Challenge a huge success!

**We received 589 gifts
to give families 1,057 nights
of care, comfort, and kindness!**



Love Knows No Bounds

Love knows no bounds, as Chuck and Allison generously share their journey into parenthood:

"Pearl joined our family through adoption. When you start the process of adoption, they tell you every adoption is different and that you shouldn't expect anything. So, of course, we went online to see what most adoptions are like.

For most people, you are paired with a birthmother a few months before the birth so that you have some time to get ready. Then, you spend a couple weeks in the place where your baby is born doing paperwork and your family gets to go home. And for a lot of people that is what happens... but not for us and Pearl.

We received a phone call we had been waiting on for years: we had been chosen to become parents. However, we did not have a few months to get ready. Our daughter was already two days old. She was in the hospital 200 miles away and she had been born premature at 27 weeks.



Pearl in the hospital

That night we learned more about Pearl. She was born at 2 pounds, 7 ounces but had fallen to just under 2 pounds. She was on a CPAP machine for her breathing, a feeding tube, the central line, and was in an incubator. Of course, this scared the heck out of us, but we were told that she was doing great considering her birth situation. We were told that she would probably be in the hospital for 3 months, meaning that we would be in for an extended stay... and we would be meeting her in 3 days.

The next day was one of the most hectic of our lives: we both went into work to wrap things up and tell people we would be out for a while—a few weeks for Chuck and a duration for me. We notified our family and friends, put the mail on hold, found someone to watch our dog, and did the piles of paperwork that needed to be done. But the most important task that we needed to accomplish that day was finding a place to stay. The most important thing we could do for Pearl was be there, not an hour away. Our social worker from the adoption agency mentioned the Ronald McDonald House, so we reached out and thankfully were able to get a room.

We arrived at the House an hour before we were due to meet Pearl for the first time. We instantly felt welcomed and supported. We went up to our room to drop off our stuff and there was a lovely gift bag of things for Pearl: books, outfits, and helpful advice for the parents of a NICU baby. These were the first "baby things" we had gotten, our first little mini baby shower.

After getting settled in, we walked over to meet Pearl. The fact that we were a 15 minute walk from our daughter would be so helpful over the next few months because we knew we could be there in a moment if we needed to—no hassle or traffic or parking—just stopping by whenever was most convenient.



Chuck with Pearl

How You Helped Families in 2023

Our Houses saved families
\$2,158,800
in lodging and meal expenses.



380
families
stayed in
our Houses.



Families
received
7,196
nights of care
and comfort.

2 out of every 5 families stayed
for more than 1 week.

1,718 volunteers donated a total of **9,844** hours.

6,220 meals
were provided for
our families.



Love Knows No Bounds

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But that first day we didn't know what to expect. After the longest 15 minutes of our lives, we were brought in to meet her. She was so small, smaller than our hands put together, but everyone was talking about what a fighter she was. They let us hold her that night and we could tuck her into our shirts so we could cuddle and bond. We knew our lives would never be the same.

The next few months brought many things: tests and treatments, health scares and health milestones and improvements for Pearl, and with us through the entire journey was the Ronald McDonald House. It was a refuge from the hustle and bustle of the hospital, a place where we could rest and re-coup, so that we were ready to be there emotionally for our daughter.

After a long day of doctors and machines, coming home to a place of quiet was amazing. The home-cooked meals prepared by local volunteers was such a relief, taking another layer of stress off of us. After Chuck returned to work, it would have been easy for me to become more isolated and alone. However, being able to come back to the House with all the comforts of home made me feel safe and supported (even when I was alone).

As the weeks went by, Pearl continued to exceed the expectations of her doctors. When we first arrived, we were expecting at least three months at the hospital. However, about six weeks into our stay, they began talking about when we could take her home. As you may imagine, there is lots of paperwork when you take a baby home for adoption. So our first few nights together as a complete family were spent in our new home away from home: the Ronald McDonald House.

I don't remember getting much sleep in those first few nights. I think every time she made a noise I ran to the bassinet to check on her. I do remember the comfort I felt, knowing that we were all together in that place. It felt fitting she joined us there because even though she will not remember those nights, we always will.



Chuck, Allison, and Pearl



Allison with Pearl

We were told that every adoption story is different. Ours is a story of sudden changes, of doctors and nurses who did everything for our baby, late nights and early mornings in the NICU, hospital food and meals cooked by local college kids, coffee in the morning in the common areas with other families getting ready for the day at the Ronald McDonald House. We stayed there for 58 days as Pearl grew stronger and healthier. They were some of the most stressful 58 days of our lives but during that time, we knew that the House would do whatever they could to make our lives easier.

Pearl may not remember her time at the Ronald McDonald House but she will know the story. She will know how much the House means to us and how we can never thank you enough for your generosity and support. Thank you."

Why We Volunteer



Kaitlyn volunteers helping families at the RMH of Connecticut front office.

Kaitlyn L.

In college, I was the service chair for a club. One of our members stayed at a Ronald McDonald House during a hospitalization, and had nothing but great things to say about the organization. So we chose RMH as our charity and we came in to cook and volunteer. Once I graduated, I loved it here so much I knew I wanted to come back.

I love being a part of the RMH family because everybody here supports one another and helps out when needed. I can always count on seeing a bunch of smiling and friendly faces when I come in.

Helping RMH is important to me because I'm an aspiring pediatrician, who wants to help make a difference in patients' lives. I know that some day when I have patients of my own, I would want them and their families to not worry about anything other than their health and getting better. The work that this organization does to alleviate stress for families and provide them with a home away from home truly makes a difference in the lives of these families, and I want to be a part of that.

Ashley T.

I began volunteering with Ronald McDonald House in the middle of the pandemic. I remember hearing about a great local non-profit that dedicated themselves to helping kids who were receiving medical care and their families. I began to follow their Wish List Wednesday posts on social media and would often reach out to family and friends for donations. As time went on, I began to further my volunteer work and helped around at RMH of Springfield with front desk needs, preparation of meals for families, and at special events.

Being able to offer even just a little of my time at the Ronald McDonald House has shown me the importance of community and the immense impact that simple acts of kindness can have on others. I am so grateful for the opportunity to continuously help others and support the organization's mission. I have met so many incredible families from all over the world and have made such valuable connections in just a short amount of time. I have heard the inspiring stories of those families and have seen firsthand how much RMHC has impacted their lives. To have been able to contribute to even a little piece of that is absolutely priceless to me.



Ashley donates wish list items to our Springfield House and prepares a meal for families!

Announcing Our Mission Expansion Campaign

Ronald McDonald House Charities of CT & Western MA is launching a combined campaign to expand our ability to serve families during their children's health journeys, and we need your help.

We have identified two ways to ensure our Chapter meets the needs of families that require resources and support during the most challenging of times— the medical crisis of their child. We will enhance our Ronald McDonald House of Connecticut and Ronald McDonald House of Springfield services to provide hundreds of additional families with comfort and support in our Houses. The combined campaign will fund the expansion of these vital programs.

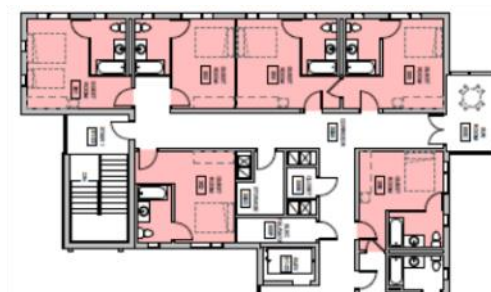
More Rooms, More Love: Expanding RMH of Connecticut

With the ability to house 18 families a night, Ronald McDonald House of CT operates at full capacity and we find ourselves unable to provide hundreds of requested nights to families desperately needing our home away from home.

The increased demand for services requires Ronald McDonald House of Connecticut to expand its number of guest rooms from 18 to 29 in order to support our families. Fortunately, in 2017, the building committee had the foresight to plan for a future expansion. During construction of the House, necessary plumbing and electrical services were placed behind the walls in the space currently being used for staff offices. The conversion and furnishing of this space into additional guest rooms will cost approximately \$1.4 million and will enable us to meet the growing demand for our services.



Second Floor – Additional 5 Guest Rooms



Third Floor – Additional 6 Guest Rooms

Rebuild, Renew, Restore: Revitalizing RMH of Springfield

Ronald McDonald House of Springfield was built 33 years ago, and the wear and tear on the exterior of the building has caused severe deterioration of the siding, roof, gutters, and windows, to the point of needing full replacement. By addressing these repairs quickly, we are able to ensure that no family is turned away due to further deterioration of the House's outer structure. The outdoor space in the backyard requires replacement as the deterioration of the original playground required removal last fall. Our plan is to create an inviting space that includes a children's play area, a family activity section, and a pergola to provide shade.

The combined \$450,00 project will revitalize the House, ensure the longevity of our special home, and provide new and inviting spaces for families to find moments of outdoor fun, relaxation, and fresh air to support recovery.



The process of revitalizing the old exterior to the new façade of RMH Springfield.



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Did you know ?

You can support RMHC families
right from your smartphone!



Mark Your Calendars! 2024 Events

March 22
13th Annual
Dancing Under the Stars

May 20
38th Annual Connecticut
Golf Tournament

November 8–21
Springfield's 4th Annual
Trees of Hope

April 6
33rd Annual
Springfield Gala

August 5
24th Annual Springfield
Golf Tournament

December 7–15
Connecticut's 35th Annual
Trees of Hope