



# Home Front

SPRING/SUMMER 2020

A PUBLICATION OF RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE CHARITIES DETROIT

## A NOTE FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Hello friends!

Whew, we've been through quite a lot already this year haven't we? And it's only May! I hope you're doing well and are as excited for summer and spending more time outdoors as I am.

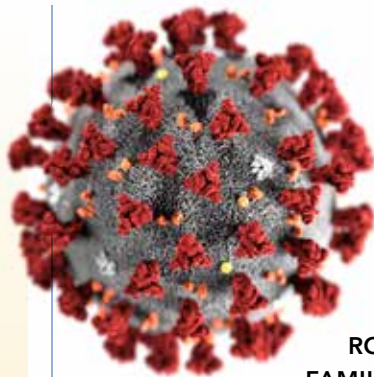
I want to thank everyone who supported us, and continues to support us, as we navigate the unfamiliar territory of a pandemic, social distancing, sheltering in place, and crisis recovery, all while continuing to keep the families in our House healthy and happy. I am so proud of our staff, who came together to ensure seamless continuation of services for our families. And I am so thankful for our volunteers and donors, who stood with us and offered help in any way they could.

Sadly, due to the pandemic, we had to cancel and reschedule some of our favorite events, temporarily close our doors to our amazing volunteers, and limit the number of people in our House...so our fundraising took a bit of a hit. I hope you'll support us through this by joining us at one of our wonderful remaining events, signing up to serve a meal, or sending in a donation. I'm so looking forward to seeing everyone again, even if it's six feet apart!

Hope to see you soon,

*Jennifer J. Litomisky*

Jennifer J. Litomisky  
Executive Director



## CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

AS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC SPREADS ACROSS THE WORLD, THE FAMILIES AT THE RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE OF DETROIT FACED A NEW CHALLENGE. THERE WAS NO WAY TO STAY HOME AND TOTALLY SELF-ISOLATE WHEN THERE WERE STILL DOCTORS APPOINTMENTS, CHEMO TREATMENTS, AND PREMATURE BABIES WHO NEEDED CARE. THE RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE REMAINS OPEN TO THE FAMILIES WHO WERE LIVING IN THE HOUSE AT THE TIME THE PANDEMIC BEGAN SO THEY COULD CONTINUE TO BE NEAR THE MEDICAL CARE THEIR CHILD NEEDED. IN THIS NEWSLETTER, WE'RE TELLING THE STORIES OF TWO FAMILIES WHO SHELTERED AT THE RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE OF DETROIT DURING THE PANDEMIC OUTBREAK.

## MEET THE IRVIN-WALKER FAMILY

Hannah Irvin and Jonathan Walker have lived in the Detroit area for several years. Here they had their first daughter, Aurora, age 11 months, and Hannah worked in food service as a trained pastry chef and server. When Hannah became pregnant with their second daughter, the family decided it was time to move back to Pennsylvania, where Hannah's family lives.

They set a moving date and made arrangements so that they would move near the end of Hannah's second trimester, which would give them plenty of time to settle into their new home before the baby came. At the end of January

2020, they moved out of their home and packed everything into a moving truck. Hannah wanted to work a few more shifts before they moved, so they planned to stay in a hotel for a weekend before driving to Philadelphia. During her shift, Hannah, who was only 29 weeks pregnant, began to experience some pain that felt like contractions. Her manager drove her to the hospital and called Jonathan to meet them. She was admitted, her water broke and she was taken in for an emergency c-section. That day their daughter Alani was born, 10 weeks early and fighting for her life.

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Because she was born prematurely, Alani was born with a condition called pulmonary stenosis which means that several of the arteries leading to her heart are too small to properly pump blood. She is under the care of the incredible team at Children's Hospital of Michigan. While she's there, Hannah, Jonathan, and Aurora

are staying at the Ronald McDonald House so that they can be by her side. They've been in the House for two and a half months now and will stay until Alani's heart is healthy enough for her to leave the hospital.

The Irvin-Walker family is grateful to have a safe place to stay during this stressful time and they hope that Alani will be strong enough to go home soon.



## MEET MARY & MARIA

If you follow us on social media or have been to the House in the last 8 months, you know Mary and Maria! Since August of 2019, Maria, age 18,

and Mary, age 10, and their family have called the Ronald McDonald House of Detroit their home while

the girls undergo a series of surgeries at Beaumont Hospital. They came from Spanish Town, Jamaica with their mom and uncle and will be here until their final surgery and follow up appointments are finished,



which will be late summer or early fall of 2020.

Throughout the pandemic, Mary and Maria have remained in the Ronald McDonald House. It's a safe haven for them and a place to call home during a difficult time. Though so many hospitals have switched their focus to caring for Covid-19, Mary and Maria continue to need care for their condition, follow up appointments for their surgeries, and visits with their doctor.

## PANTRY PARTNERS

Pantry Partners are crucial to making our house feel like a home. They adopt a month to provide RMHC Detroit with a portion of our house needs list for that month.

Pantry Partners agree to purchase or donate in-kind up to \$500 worth of wishlist items for a month. There are many ways to be a Pantry Partner, like holding a

drive for cleaning products or snacks at your office or do a jeans day fundraiser and purchase all of the items through our Amazon Wishlist. Contact Marketing and Development Associate **Nicky Bates** at [nbates@rmhc-detroit.org](mailto:nbates@rmhc-detroit.org) or **313-966-9084** for more information.







# THE DEB VIRGILES FAMILY FUND

In honor and memory of Deb Virgiles, long time board member, volunteer, and friend, Ronald McDonald House Charities Detroit has started the Deb Virgiles Family Fund.

Deb loved and served the families of the Detroit House for more than 12 years. In honor of her commitment to the House, the goal of her tribute fund is to cover all costs for every family who comes to stay with us.



***A gift to this fund ensures every family has a home away from home while their child is hospitalized for years to come.***

For more information or to contribute to this fund, contact **Chrissy Cooper**, Director of Marketing and Development, at **313-745-9487** or **[ccooper@rmhc-detroit.org](mailto:ccooper@rmhc-detroit.org)**.

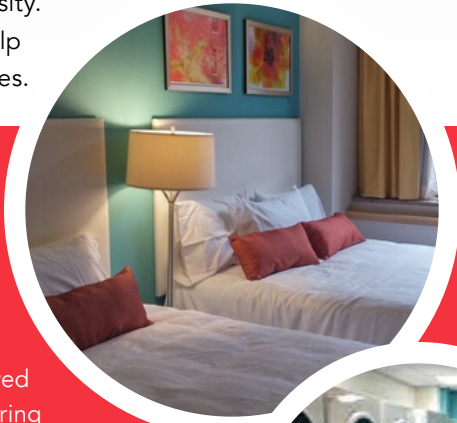
Changes in funding and increases in our costs, as well as changes in healthcare costs and insurance coverage, have all added up to make life at our House more expensive. In addition, some of our bedrooms and common rooms are showing signs of wear and tear and are in need of refreshing and updating.

Our ability to continue to deliver the same high level of care and comfort our families need depends on your generosity. There are two ways you can help "Share a Night" with our families.

The first is through the Deborah Virgiles Family Fund, which aims to cover all the costs associated with a family's stay in our House. The other is by adopting an area of the House that needs to be shown a little extra love and attention. Contact Marketing and Development Director **Chrissy Cooper** for more information at **[ccooper@rmhc-detroit.org](mailto:ccooper@rmhc-detroit.org)** or **313-745-9487**.

## WHAT'S INCLUDED FOR OUR FAMILIES

The average length of stay for most families at Ronald McDonald House Charities Detroit is 5 to 7 days, though there are families who have stayed at the House for over a year. During each family's stay, whether they're with us for one night or 100 nights, we make sure they have everything they need to be comfortable. This includes fresh linens, toiletries, laundry and detergent, regular hot meals provided by



volunteers, snacks, and internet access. Our staff and volunteers work to provide these items and services at the lowest cost possible and often families contribute to their own costs if they're able. Despite our best efforts to keep costs down, the cost of hosting a family for a week is \$1,700.

These families are struggling with the unexpected medical costs and having a place to stay and the emotional support of our staff and volunteers can help relieve some of their burden. Your support helps cover these costs associated with a family's stay.



# MOMENTS AROUND THE HOUSE



Our Executive Director, Jennifer, celebrated 20 years of running Ronald McDonald House Charities Detroit in January!



A mom and her sweet sons pose with blankets made by donor Jane Hynes.



Maria, Izzy, and Mary met here at the Ronald McDonald House and became fast friends. When they're all in the House at the same time, they have a LOT of fun!



New mom Chelsea holds her baby, Damien.



Maria turned 18 while staying in the House and asked for someone to paint her nails. Marketing and Development Associate Nicky was happy to oblige!



Mary and Maria saw snow for the first time!

## EVENTS: UPCOMING & RECAPS

Due to the changing nature of the pandemic, please watch your inbox or check our website for updates about events. We will adhere to stay at home orders and hope to reschedule all of our events that fall within that time to a later date!

Our events help us raise money to provide a supportive, comforting "home away from home" for the families of critically ill and injured children. Thank you to those that attended, planned, and sponsored our year-end events!



### HOLIDAY TEA

Thank you to Chairpeople Charlene Mitchell, Rodgers and Robert Reaves

### HOUSE CHEF CHALLENGE

Thank you to Chairpersons Sheri Mark, Renee Chodkowski, Stacy Vieder, Sammy Vieder, Lisa Rosenberg, and Elizabeth Sollish



House Chef judges Ryan Ermanni, Jay Towers, and Luanne Ewald

# THANK YOU!

We want to extend a huge thank you to those that have helped our families during the pandemic. We could not have weathered this difficult time without the help from those that stepped up and helped us provide meals to those sheltering in our House.

## THE CHILDREN'S FOUNDATION

The Children's Foundation, one of our biggest supporters and partners in providing care for families while their child is critically ill, reached out to us to offer their support during the pandemic. Their generous gift helped us with operating costs during the pandemic, so we could focus on caring for the families in the House.

## FEED THE NEED

In March, we realized that it was no longer safe for meal volunteers to come in and out of the House every day. It was a difficult decision, but it was for the safety of our families. We needed to be sure we could still provide food every day so we asked our supporters to help. Several hundred individuals stepped up to raise \$8,000. These funds have been an immense help and allowed us to provide food for our families every day. Because of this fund, we can offer a variety of food from delivery services and stock our pantry with the family's favorite items from the grocery store. Thank you to those donors!

# VOLUNTEERS

We can't thank our volunteers enough. When we had to cancel our meal program, many of our long-time meal volunteers like Northridge Church, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Amrock stepped up and paid for meals to be sent to the House.

We would love to have you come volunteer after the stay home mandate has been lifted! Here are some volunteer opportunities:

1. **Volunteer to make a meal for the House**
2. **Volunteer at one of our future fundraising events**

For more information, call the front desk at **313-745-5909**.

# PLANNED GIVING

When you choose to leave a legacy gift to Ronald McDonald House Charities Detroit, you're ensuring that the families of critically ill and injured children have a supportive and comfortable place just minutes from their child for years to come. In the face of uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic, planned gifts helped us stay open and serve families who needed us. Your planned gift can help us in the future!

There are many ways to leave a legacy gift to Ronald McDonald House Charities Detroit, including:

- Making a bequest in your will
- Creating a charitable gift annuity
- Making a gift of life insurance
- Donating your retirement assets
- IRA Planned Giving
- Giving a gift of stocks or bonds

Your support will help us bolster our endowment, creating a lasting impact on the families of critically ill and injured children for decades to come. For more information or assistance in setting up a planned gift, contact Marketing and Development Director **Chrissy Cooper** at **313-745-9487** or **ccooper@rmhc-detroit.org**.

Have you already chosen to leave a legacy gift to Ronald McDonald House Charities Detroit? Please contact Chrissy and let us know!





# RED SHOE SOCIETY

Do you want to contribute to **Ronald McDonald House Charities Detroit**, but don't think your gift can make a difference? It can! Join our Red Shoe Society to make a nominal monthly gift to make a difference in the lives of families who are going through a tough time. Over time, your gift of \$10 to \$50 a month adds up to support families while their child receives care at a local hospital. Visit our website at **rmhc-detroit.org** or contact Marketing and Development Associate **Nicky Bates** at **nbates@rmhc-detroit.org** or **313-966-9084**.



**Ronald McDonald  
House Charities®  
Detroit**

Keeping families close®

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Detroit, MI 48201

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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