“Doctors told us she would never walk again,” said Heather, Hannah’s mom.
“But Hannah is not one to give up—it’s not what she does.”

(Photography by Kasey Rimkus, Wonder Photography)
FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Dear friends of the Ronald McDonald House of Rochester,

Heartfelt greetings from the House! We hope this newsletter finds you well and enjoying the last days of summer. It has been a busy few months at the House, and likely for you as well. Families staying at the House have enjoyed our outdoor spaces, participated in Camp Ronald, and welcomed Paw Pals and Visiting Artists in recent months. What a joy it has been to see so much activity and energy!

As we adjust to shorter days, cooler temperatures, and changing colors, we look forward to all that fall brings to our mission. Following are a few highlights. Please check our website and social media pages for additional ways to support children and families in the coming months.

FAMILY WALK – Saturday, September 11, 2021
Grab your sneakers and friends and family to walk to support the Ronald McDonald House of Rochester! The route is an easy 1.8 miles and can be walked in less than an hour. 100% of the registration fees will support the Ronald McDonald House of Rochester and its children and families.

CANS FOR KIDS – Saturday, October 16, 2021
Start saving your aluminum cans now for Cans for Kids! Simply drive through the front parking lot and drop off your cans for recycling. It is an easy way to support the House and help the environment, too!

GIVE TO THE MAX DAY – Thursday, November 18, 2021
We are thrilled to have a matching gift opportunity for Give to the Max Day this year! More information will be shared as we get closer to the date. This important fundraising day has raised more than $165,000 for the Ronald McDonald House of Rochester over the past 11 years.

Providing compassionate care to families when they need it most is our mission and passion, and we are grateful for your continued partnership and support. May you enjoy the beauty and splendor of Fall.

In partnership,
Peggy Elliott, Executive Director

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MISSION STATEMENT
The Ronald McDonald House of Rochester, Minnesota, provides a home away from home and gives support to families seeking medical care for their children.

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Hannah is very bright. She graduated high school when she was 16 years old and enrolled at Pearl River Community College (Poplarville, Miss.) three days later. Her dream is to teach science or art at a school for deaf children.

But her journey is more impressive than her destination.

Five years ago, Hannah and her family were walking around a store when, all of a sudden...she could no longer walk. Heather, her mother, knew it was serious.

The family lives in a small town in Mississippi, so they traveled to New Orleans for Hannah's initial medical care. The answers were not good.

Hannah was diagnosed with Complex Regional Pain Syndrome. CRPS is uncommon, particularly in children—she is the youngest person ever diagnosed in New Orleans and most doctors have never treated it. Its cause is not fully understood and the pain is disproportionate and debilitating. Hannah started water therapy and needed a wheelchair for an extended time.

"Doctors told us she would never walk again," said Heather. "But Hannah is not one to give up—it's not what she does."

And her condition worsened.

Hannah was hospitalized for pneumonia and heart complications on multiple occasions. Communication stopped in her body and her organs suffered—appendix, gall bladder, lungs, heart, stomach; it was time for more answers.

Hannah and her mom packed for New York, but doctors in The Big Apple said Mayo Clinic in Rochester was where she should receive care.

The referral was vital—Mayo discovered Hannah has Von Willebrand Disease, which is similar, but differentiated from classic hemophilia. The bleeding disorder is typically mild and relatively common...in adults. The discovery simply added more questions.

"It is not found in children," said Heather. "And she was 13 when she was diagnosed."

The result was regularly scheduled trips to Rochester for blood infusions, symptom assessment, and medicine treatment in 2017.

After creating a plan with her care team for regular appointments only beginning in 2018, Hannah developed anaphylactic reactions and was diagnosed with mast cell disease. Mast cell disease
is rare and people with the condition experience unexplained, severe allergic reactions.

The result was more trips to Rochester.

Heather and Hannah have stayed at the House nine times for more than 100 total nights. And they learned about the Ronald McDonald House on their first trip.

“All I knew about the House was that it is an inexpensive place to stay,” said Heather. “But I quickly learned… it’s so much more.”

“The House is so welcoming,” Hannah said. “They are genuinely interested in me.”

The side effects Hannah experiences are significant—she wears a mask in public, she had feeding tubes for a while, she uses a walking stick or a wheelchair for mobility. She was discouraged. But the House was a refuge for her.

“It’s my favorite thing about the House,” said Heather. “No one asks why she is wearing a mask or why she is in a wheelchair. She can be a kid.”

“She feels like she belongs.”

Hannah thrives in the House. She loves playing video games and creating masterpieces. She describes both activities as “great escapes” from her medical issues. And when she walks into the House after a long day: “I check my mailbox!” The handmade cards and gifts are very meaningful and lift her spirits.

And she is always greeted with a smile and a “welcome home.”

“T helps me forget about the hard things I went through that day,” Hannah said.

Hannah has made lifelong friends while enjoying House Dinners as well.

“I have friends from Alabama, California, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Minnesota, and Montana—literally all over the country,” said Hannah.

“And it’s not Facebook friends,” Heather said. “They are true friends. One family in Minneapolis picks us up from the airport, hosts us at their home, drives us to the House in Rochester, and drives us back to the airport when our stay is over.”

“They’re family.”

And friends are not the only family Heather and Hannah found at the House—volunteers are the heart of the House.

“I will be drawing alone or playing a game alone and a volunteer will come in and start drawing or play with me,” Hannah said. “They invest in me. It makes me feel special.”
Heather and Hannah recall a college student who would spend every night with her... and another who gave Hannah the shoes off of her feet on a wintry night in October.

“She was walking around in the snow without proper shoes,” said Heather. “I will never forget what she did for my daughter...”

“The volunteers are truly incredible.”

“I am more than an illness,” said Hannah. “They see me.”

Heather and Hannah experienced the House before the expansion... which means they also experienced waiting for a room. But the Ronald McDonald House of Rochester completed an expansion in 2019—the 70-room House is the largest House in Minnesota, 13th largest in the country, and 18th largest in the world. The expansion will make the wait time significantly less.

“I want more kids and parents to experience the House,” said Hannah.

“No wait list will help families...financially and emotionally,” said Heather.

Heather said her husband always asks are you in the House yet because he is confident in their living situation and he knows they are safe when they are staying at the House.

The House was expanded and is sustained by many generous donors.

“The generosity in Rochester is overwhelming,” Heather said. “Some donation plaques have business names, but some have family names. Another family is supporting my family.”

“It’s very special.”

“Often times...people do things for others because it has personal benefit,” said Hannah. “But not here—not in Rochester and not at the Ronald McDonald House. They do it for me.”

“It’s incredible.”

Hannah is on a long journey. Her medical team will remain with her until she is 22 years old and have transition plans in place for a local doctor—specialty care will no longer be necessary. Her dream is to live independently.

But as Hannah knows... every journey begins with a single step.

“I’m excited for her and her future—a future made possible by Mayo Clinic and the Ronald McDonald House,” said Heather.

Heather and Hannah describe the Ronald McDonald House as their family. Welcoming. Kind. Generous. Supportive. And so much more.

“I do not know where we would be without the House,” said Heather. “It would be hard. We have so much gratitude.”

“Hannah is not simply surviving...she is thriving.”
FAMILY ACTIVITIES

The Ronald McDonald House of Rochester strives to focus on the whole family: the patient, siblings, parents, grandparents, and more; while recognizing that everyone in the family unit plays a part in the medical journey.

Because medical appointments do not take a summer vacation, the House makes every effort to provide activities that the children and families can enjoy while spending time in Rochester.

Camp Ronald has become a beloved annual summer event that families look forward to each year.

Due to the current conditions of COVID-19 still in the world around us, we are continuing to make every effort to find new ways to carry out these programs in a safe and exciting way for our families.

In 2021, Camp Ronald was enjoyed remotely by 42 families, in the form of a beach tote bag filled with all things related to summer fun and things to do around Rochester!
For seven years, the Ronald McDonald House has been the charity of choice for Rochester’s Med City Marathon. Final Stretch and Med City Marathon have inspired thousands of runners to support the families of the Ronald McDonald House and helped gather countless community members to participate in the Ronald McDonald House Family Walk, sponsored by Data-Smart Computers & Telecommunications.

On September 12, Sarah Hundorf is lacing up as a Ronald McDonald House Charity Runner in the Med City Half Marathon. She has inspired many throughout her journey, encouraging her friends, family, and community to support the House.

**Raising more than $5,500, Sarah has gone the extra mile to support children and families at the Ronald McDonald House of Rochester.**

**Why did you choose to support the Ronald McDonald House as a Charity Runner?**

There are so many reasons! The main reason is the little guy in the picture: Lincoln. He heard the all too common words, “You have cancer.” I wanted to support, not only him, but his family. I know that, by showing my support in this way, there will be a few families that have a little less to worry about.

**Your friends, family, and community have really rallied behind you. Tell us about how their support has continued to motivate you during your training.**

I would not have been able to keep myself going without them. The encouragement that everyone has shown me is absolutely motivating. They have been the driving force behind the fundraising. I am putting in the mileage; they are putting in the dollars. I wish I had enough room to write down every person who has supported me through this, but I don’t, so a huge thank you to everyone! You, my supporters, have all made the difference!

**What advice do you have to others looking to get involved in supporting families at the Ronald McDonald House of Rochester?**

Find your why and get your support team ready! You will be amazed at what people are willing to do to help you attain your goal when it comes to supporting the House. Do it with your heart!

If you are interested in participating as a Charity Runner in future Med City Marathon events, please contact Angela Christensen at achristensen@rmhmn.org or 507-252-2163.
**GIVE TO THE MAX DAY**

Give to the Max Day was created in 2009 to launch GiveMN, a collaborative venture led by Minnesota Community Foundation and other organizations committed to helping make our state a better place.

Every year, thousands of organizations and individuals generate donations and excitement for causes throughout Minnesota.

Last year, your generosity on Give to the Max Day helped raise more than $17,000 to support children and families at the Ronald McDonald House of Rochester!

This year, when Minnesotans join together in the state's largest day of giving, donors to the Ronald McDonald House of Rochester will have the opportunity to have their gift doubled!

Watch your email and our social media accounts for more information as the big day approaches and help continue to make hope and healing possible at the House!

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**UPCOMING EVENTS**

| **FAMILY WALK** sponsored by Data-Smart Computers | Saturday, Sept. 11, 11:30 a.m. |
| a Med City Marathon event | **REGISTER BY MONDAY, SEPT. 6** |

| **CANS FOR KIDS** with McNeilus Companies | Saturday, Oct. 16, 8 a.m. - 12 p.m. |
| Ronald McDonald House of Rochester | Ronald McDonald House of Rochester 850 2nd St. SW, Rochester, MN 55902 |
RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE
STAFF ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Ronald McDonald House of Rochester team is growing to better serve children and families!

Brianna Boland
Started as House Manager in April

Kayla Newman
Started as House Manager in March

Heather (JJ) James
Started as Volunteer Associate in February

Erin Szabo
Started as House Manager in July

Ken Klotzbach
Started as Facility Associate in July

Keri Leisen
Promoted to Executive Assistant in August
SHARE YOUR STORY!
Each family who has stayed at the House has a unique and beautiful story!
Your story is the reason people support the House!
Contact Jacob Dreyer, Communications Director, for more information.

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