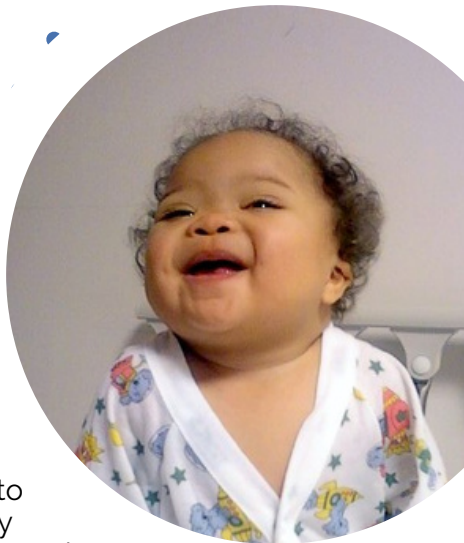




Gabbi



Shortly after her first birthday, Gabriella underwent heart surgery.

The night before Gabbi's surgery, her mom, Monica, and dad, Steve, came to stay at Ronald McDonald House. They were anxious and afraid of what the next day held for their daughter but found comfort in the heart of any home - the kitchen. There they gathered with other families who understood the challenges they were facing.

Before they learned about Ronald McDonald House, they thought they would have to spend a lot of money to stay in a hotel and drive to and from the hospital every day.

They had no idea how long Gabbi would need to be in the hospital after her surgery and it was a comfort to know that no matter how long they needed to stay, they had Ronald McDonald House to call home.

Prior to their stay, Monica and Steve had not noticed the Ronald McDonald House Charities donation boxes at McDonald's restaurants. Monica said, "I never thought I'd ever need to stay at a Ronald McDonald House," but now she has a new appreciation for everything the House programs do for families, and she always drops her change in. "I will always give back to Ronald McDonald House."

Within the next 10 years, Gabbi will need another heart surgery and they hope that wherever her family's journey takes them, they can stay at a Ronald McDonald House.

**"The House was
a life- saver."**

- Monica

Gabbi's Mom

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Merrick

Merrick was in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit for 92 days battling a blood infection, pneumonia, and struggling with symptoms related to his congenital heart defect. Later, he was additionally diagnosed with chronic lung disease, apnea, and eye disease.



Merrick's mom and dad couldn't find the specialized treatment he needed where they live, so even though it was almost four hours away, they decided to move his care to specialists in Washington, D.C.

For each appointment, they had to wake up in the middle of the night to drive nearly four hours, drive another four hours home, and then head back to work the next day. It was exhausting but worth it. For the first time since bringing Merrick home, he was thriving, gaining weight, and meeting milestones.

Merrick's mom, Kristie, said, "We were so happy when we were given a room at Ronald McDonald House. There is no specialized pediatric care where we live, so we must travel. Having a place to stay near your child alleviates so much of the stress.

There are no words to describe what it is like to be the parent of a sick child. Nothing else seems to matter, but the world around you does not stop. You still have to eat, sleep, shower, work, and keep up with responsibilities at home. The services provided by the partners of Ronald McDonald House change the lives of families like mine."

**"I want to
give my
heartfelt
thanks to
all who
have
contributed
to making
the Ronald
McDonald
House all
that it is."**

- Kristie

Merrick's Mom

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Zachary



At just five-years-old, Zachary's doctors determined he needed a second heart surgery, immediately.

With little time to prepare, Zachary's parents' anxiety climbed. They lived over 60 miles away from the hospital and had four other children in their care. Zachary's health and keeping their family together became top priorities.

That's when Zachary's mom, Lori, found out about Ronald McDonald House. On the long drive there, Zachary begged to go back home. Even though he knew he needed to see the doctors so they could fix his "sick heart," Zachary was nervous.

Lori and her husband began to feel better after arriving and touring the House. They were surprised at everything available to them, from the volunteer-cooked meals that stocked the fridge to the comfortable rooms and beds, Lori says it was all more than she could have hoped.

But Zachary was still a ball of nerves. Then he saw the game room. For the next few hours, he played virtual tennis with his dad, an escape that Lori says made all the difference. The simple act of playing a video game made everything feel a little more normal and a little less scary.

The next morning, Zachary went into surgery and recovered quickly. According to Lori, having all the basic needs of her family handled allowed them to focus completely on her son and his recovery.

Lori calls the Ronald McDonald House a blessing and a haven during a time when everything else felt chaotic and out of control. Knowing their family wouldn't be separated during such a tough time gave them the feeling of absolute, unconditional love.

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Avery

At just five and a half months pregnant, Angel delivered twin girls, Aubrey and Avery. The sisters were both born at just over 1 lb.

Doctors gave them less than a 20% chance of survival. Angel and her husband JR stayed at Ronald McDonald House when the girls were born. When Aubrey was two days old, doctors said she would not make it through the night.

Staying just steps away at Ronald McDonald House, Angel and JR were able to make it to the hospital in time to hold her for the remaining minutes of her life. While grieving for their daughter, Angel and JR still had a long road to recovery with Avery.

In the eight months Avery's family spent with us, she endured heart surgery, experimental eye treatments, surgery to insert a gastrostomy tube for feeding, a brain bleed scare, and three months of ventilation.

Appropriately, the inscription on Avery's crib at home says, "Though she be but small, she is fierce." As they were leaving, Angel said, "I'm really sad to leave. [Ronald McDonald House is] just so welcoming! I've never felt like a burden and the people here have become my best friends and family."

Avery's underdeveloped lungs were scarred so badly that even at eight months old, she could not breathe on her own. Avery sees specialists and continues to improve.



"I love this place - the memories my family has made here and the friendships that happen between these walls."

- Angel
Avery's Mom

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Rowan

Rowan's illness is so rare that doctors at Children's National Medical Center do not have a diagnosis for him.

It all started when Rowan had six days of a high fever and tested positive for influenza. His pediatrician suggested Rowan's mom, Sarah, take him to the Emergency Room for an intravenous drip. After 11 hours under observation, when all of Rowan's other blood tests came back normal, they were discharged.

Just a few hours later, Rowan started seizing at home. The entire way to the hospital, Rowan experienced uncontrollable seizures. Sarah said, "During our first three nights in the hospital, I saw my son's life hang in the balance."

For the next 11 days, Rowan was intubated and put into an induced coma to control his seizures and brain inflammation. It is normal while in a coma for the body to have a physical response to stimuli, but Rowan was completely unresponsive until the 11th day when his left eye started to blink ever so slowly. His family rejoiced when he finally opened his eyes that day.

Rowan is receiving treatment to keep his seizures at bay, strengthen his immune system, and reduce his brain inflammation. His doctors are slowly ruling out possible diagnoses to find out why Rowan is so sick.

His mom says, "Although we don't have a diagnosis for Rowan, we take every small win we can get every day." As Rowan and his family take it day by day, they are incredibly thankful to be staying at our Ronald McDonald House.



**"RMHCDC
has had a
life-saving
impact on
my and
Rowan's
life."**

- Sarah

Rowan's Mom

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Emma & Ella



Emma and Ella are not only sisters, but best friends! They both have Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, a rare connective tissue disorder.

After their family traveled the country seeking help from specialists, they finally found the right treatment at Children's National Medical Center.

They made the trip from Wisconsin to Washington, D.C. so Emma could receive the neurosurgery she needed. At the time, she could only have one family member in the hospital with her. The sisters were worried about being apart during such a difficult procedure and recovery. We had a room available so that the whole family could stay together at our Ronald McDonald House.

Staying over 20 nights, Emma said the best part was "being able to come back from the hospital to start the healing process together with family."

My dad and sister were able to stay close by while I was in the hospital for six days and get my mum everything."

"From the welcome bags to the fully stocked kitchen, everything has just made our lives so much easier during this hard time."

- Emma

Patient and Guest

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Kayley



Kaley was born with a congenital condition that required she be transported immediately to Children's National Medical Center.

Since there is nowhere for parents to sleep in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Kaley's mom and dad, Chennon and Dan, planned to commute from their home in Lorton, Virginia to the hospital in Washington, D.C.

The morning after Kayley was admitted to the hospital, her parents got a call that she needed to go on a heart and lung machine, or she wouldn't survive.

It took them almost two hours through traffic to get to the hospital to sign the release forms. In the case of an emergency, Kayley's parents felt their home was too far away.

A social worker told them about Ronald McDonald House, near the hospital where Kayley was being treated. They said, "We were so relieved there was somewhere we could stay and be close to Kayley."

Chennon and Dan stayed at the House for nearly three weeks before they were able to take their baby girl home.

Thank you for your hospitality and for allowing us to stay at your place while our daughter was being cared for."

– *Chennon*
Kayley's Mom

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Caden



Shortly after Caden was born, he went into cardiogenic shock due to an undiagnosed heart condition. His organs were quickly shutting down and he needed to be medevacked to Children's National Medical Center.

At 12 days old, Caden underwent heart surgery to correct his heart defect. The surgery went smoothly and was successful. His family thought they would be heading home after a few days of healing. But at 3 AM the following morning, the hospital called saying that Caden's lung had burst and they were struggling to keep him oxygenated. His parents were asked to return to the hospital immediately.

"Because of our room at Ronald McDonald House, we were able to be by our baby's side within 10 minutes. It would have taken upwards of an hour to get there from our house," Caden's mom said.

What followed was six weeks of surgeries, therapies, and procedures that ultimately saved Caden's life a second time.

"We live over 40 miles away from where Caden was treated. Having a 'home base' at Ronald McDonald House was a complete game changer. The House helped us take care of our basic needs so we could show up for Caden when he needed us most. We were able to stay sharp for difficult conversations and make hard decisions about Caden's treatment. Seeing all the ways that others give to support families like ours gave me a sense of connection - of family."

**"We are
now, and
forever,
part of the
RMHCDC
family."**

- Sarah

Caden's Mom

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Winnie

Winnie was born with Down Syndrome and only three chambers in her heart, instead of four. Her parents, Peggy and Brett, found the best surgeon for her at Children's National Medical Center, even though they didn't know how they would be by Winnie's side during her surgery and recovery while also caring for their four-year-old.

During this stressful time, when they needed each other most, splitting up the family didn't feel like an option.

When Peggy and Brett were referred to Ronald McDonald House, they were relieved to have the opportunity to stay together during such a fragile and emotional life event.

"Ronald McDonald House became our sanctuary, our place of calm and much-needed respite. A 'home-away-from-home' where we could get away from the revolving door of medical staff and beeping machines."

Less than a month later, Winnie underwent a four-hour surgery to patch two holes in her heart. It was an astounding success! She recovered in just five days – half the time expected.

"Knowing we were literally a five-minute drive to the hospital gave me invaluable peace of mind that we could 'come home' and take care of ourselves in order to be stronger the next day for our daughter."



**"Ronald
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much
needed
respite."**

- Peggy

Winnie's Mom

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Caleb

Caleb was born with multiple life-threatening conditions. He needed surgery, intensive care, and the love only his mom, dad, and siblings could provide.



After Caleb was born, he was rushed to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. The fragile newborn had a whole team rooting for him: his parents, Ashley and Ryan, and his siblings Skylar, Autumn, and Cooper. Caleb's family lived too far away to travel back and forth to the hospital every day.

At first, Caleb's family worried that they wouldn't be able to stay together. When a social worker told them that they could stay nearby at Ronald McDonald House, Ashley called it "a blessing," that she didn't have to worry about where her family would eat, sleep, or do laundry for the next 113 days.

Ryan says, "Ronald McDonald House enabled us to be with our son so much more than we would have been able to otherwise...That ended up being critical to his survival."

In a time of nearly paralyzing fear, the family found comfort and support inside their private room at our Ronald McDonald House. Now, Caleb and his family are happy, healthy, and home!

**"Ronald
McDonald
House
enabled us to
be with our
son so much
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would have
been able to
otherwise."**

- Ryan
Caleb's Dad

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Ayaan

Ayaan's mom, Rujuta, describes him as a sunny little boy that is full of surprises. In fact, Ayaan started life out by surprising his mom in a big way.

At 28 weeks into her pregnancy with Ayaan, Rujuta came to Washington, D.C. from London on a work-related trip. While here, she unexpectedly went into labor and stayed much longer than planned.

Ayaan was born weighing 2 lbs 14 oz and needed help breathing and eating, as well as a blood transfusion. He received care in the hospital for 10 weeks before Rujuta and her husband, Paul, could take him home.

Rujuta said, "As a newborn, it was critical for us to form bonds and to get him started in life. We treasure the time we spent together, especially the skin-to-skin contact which really seemed to help him progress."

After spending long days with Ayaan at the hospital, Rujuta and Paul were so grateful to come back to a volunteer-prepared meal and the people who make our House a home. She says, "The real heart of the House is the kindness from staff, volunteers, and fellow residents. Being far away from home we did not have our support system of close family and friends with us and it was lovely to have [a community]."

Ayaan continues to surprise his family – most recently by beginning to develop his own jokes! He also loves being outdoors and being a big brother to his baby sister, Zoya.



"It's unimaginable for us to think of Ayaan being on his own in the hospital without us nearby."

- Rujuta

Ayaan's Mom

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Trace



At 25 weeks, Erin had an emergency cesarean section. Trace was born at 1 lb 1 oz, with less than a 10% chance of surviving his first 72 hours. Doctors told Erin not to worry when she didn't hear her newborn cry, saying his lungs were too underdeveloped for him to make noise. When Trace entered the world with the tiniest wails, Erin and her husband Kevin were comforted and knew he was a fighter.

The first three days of Trace's life were touch and go. On top of their fear and stress over Trace's condition, Erin and Kevin had to leave the hospital as soon as Erin was stable. Erin said the thought of having to go home every night, over two hours away from her critical baby, was unbearable.

When Erin found out about Ronald McDonald House, she felt blessed. "Everything is here for you. I can focus on my baby and not worry about anything else. It's such a comforting place to be in a situation like this - it really is a 'home-away-from-home.'"

Trace has endured his lungs collapsing and hemorrhaging, 25+ blood transfusions, and a failing liver. Nurses watched over him 24 hours a day to monitor his critical condition. Erin said she knew her little fighter would make it when she put her finger in his hand and he gripped it tightly.

Kevin says, "Ronald McDonald House truly made all the difference in the world in Trace's recovery and improvement because staying at [the House] has allowed us to be by Trace's side non-stop."

**"Ronald
McDonald
House truly
made all
the
difference
in the world
in Trace's
recovery."**

- Kevin

Trace's Dad

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Faylen

Faylen was born six weeks early and was diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis, liver disease, and a perforated bowel. Faylen's mom, Alexis, and a team of doctors fought for her survival every day, not knowing if she would make it through the next 24 hours.



After being on the transplant wait list for one month, a miraculous match was found and Faylen received a life-saving liver, bowel, and pancreas transplant. Alexis was exhausted but relieved that her daughter was on the road to recovery.

Then, doctors said Faylen needed to see specialists far from home for continued treatment. Faylen was on 22 medications to prevent her body from rejecting her new organs and her immune system was dangerously low. Alexis had already rushed Faylen to the emergency room for life-threatening infections and was concerned about another two-hour drive if she got sick again.

Thankfully, a social worker told Alexis about Ronald McDonald House. She could stay close to the hospital while her daughter received treatment and she never had to worry about being too far away if there was an emergency.

Alexis loved coming home to meals cooked by volunteer groups, saying, "Thank goodness I didn't have to cook on top of everything else." For eight months, she was grateful to have room at Ronald McDonald House and a comfortable bed to sleep in so she could have the energy to focus on her daughter's recovery.

"My child wouldn't have made it if we weren't so close to the hospital."

- Alexis

Faylen's Mom

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Audrey



You-Shin and Derrick were all set to move to Michigan. They had sold their house, packed everything up, and purchased plane tickets. You-Shin was 33 weeks pregnant with their daughter, Audrey.

One week before they moved, You-Shin went in for her last prenatal exam. During her check-up, You-Shin's doctors noticed a dramatic drop in Audrey's heart rate and strongly recommended delivering her immediately by emergency cesarean section. You-Shin's husband, Derrick, was already in Michigan - she was terrified to deliver her baby alone and so far from her due date.

Scared and all by herself, You-Shin made the difficult decision to deliver Audrey early. "She's the boss," You-Shin joked, "She wanted to be a Virginian!" Born seven weeks early, Audrey had a lot of growing and treatment ahead before she could go home. Since their new home was in Michigan, You-Shin and Derrick had nowhere to stay while Audrey was hospitalized.

Thankfully, they were referred to Ronald McDonald House. "It was a lifesaver!" You-Shin said.

"[The Ronald McDonald House is] such a homey place." You-Shin loves how bright and clean it is, the volunteer meal groups that cook for the families, meeting other families, and having a shuttle service to the hospital. She says everything "psychologically and physically helps you heal."

"We are very grateful for... Ronald McDonald House. They helped us focus on what is most important: Audrey's development and care."

- Derrick
Audrey's Dad

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Corrigan

About four days after Corrigan was born, he began having seizures and showing other signs of distress.

Corrigan was diagnosed with a rare genetic disorder. Two treatment options were available: a lifetime of severely restricted diet and strong medications or an organ transplant. His medical team felt that diet and medication would be the best course of action and for ten years his parents navigated a precarious balancing act, until puberty threw Corrigan into metabolic instability.

After five crisis events in four months, a transplant became the only option to save his brain and his life. Transplant protocol required that Corrigan not live more than an hour away from the hospital while his body adjusted to the new organ. Willing to do anything to save their son's life, his parents agreed, despite living over two hours away from the hospital. They couldn't afford to rent a home or stay in a hotel nearby.

If not for Ronald McDonald House, they said they would have had to sleep in their car for two months.

"The Ronald McDonald House allowed us to sleep in a bed, instead of the cot in Corrigan's hospital room, have a shower, grab food lovingly prepared by volunteers, regroup, recharge, and return to the hospital the next morning with the smile we all needed to keep going."



**"RMHCDC
gives
families
like ours
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to find
strength,
comfort,
and hold
on to our
hope."**

- Mindy

Corrigan's Mom

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