



# HEROES HAPPEN EVERY DAY

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2015 RMHC® ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT



# CONTENTS

Ronald McDonald House Charities®: Fundamental to the Medical Landscape .....	5
Outgoing CEO: Malcolm Coutts .....	6
Incoming CEO: Barbara Ryan .....	7
Our Programs .....	8
Research Studies	
RMHC Helps Families by Reducing Stress and Financial Burdens .....	10
Family Proximity to the Hospital Provides Important Psychological Benefits .....	13
RMHC Helps Improve Quality of Life for Children and Caregivers.....	16
Ronald McDonald Houses Help Strengthen Family Coping Abilities .....	18
Impact Across Australia 2015.....	20
Research Studies cont.	
Parents of Hospitalised Children Experience High Levels of Stress and Anxiety During and Long After their Child's Hospital Stay.....	22
Parents Get Better Sleep and Children Cope with Medical Trauma Through Play .....	24
Ronald McDonald House is a Safe and Cost-Effective Alternative to Hospitalisation .....	26
Hospital and Medical Leaders Believe RMHC Makes a Significant Positive Contribution to the Care System .....	28
The Ronald McDonald Learning Program Benefits a Child's Knowledge, Self Concept, Behaviour and Happiness.....	30
Corporate Partnerships .....	32
Our Supporters .....	34
Directory.....	36
The Future is Yours .....	38







## RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE CHARITIES: FUNDAMENTAL TO THE MEDICAL LANDSCAPE

“Over the last three decades the role of Ronald McDonald Houses in the ‘total care’ of children and families has become increasingly recognised and appreciated across Australia. The fact that expert paediatric facilities and specialty teams are highly centralised is an international reality. Consequently, children and families may need to travel great distances to receive care in a Children’s Hospital, often for long periods and/or over multiple occasions. This is particularly true for Australian rural or regional families. It then follows that, because we firmly believe that families need to be with their child as much as possible, a ‘home away from home’ is a critical part of total care. Ronald McDonald Houses meet the needs of children and their families in an adaptable, nurturing and supportive environment. They provide comfort, reassurance and deal with many of the practical obstacles to optimal care. The family can then better focus on the treatment program and devote their attention to the physical and emotional needs of their child. Care is able to be both comprehensive and more effective.”

Professor Les White AM DSc  
MBBS FRACP MHA AFACHSM  
NSW Chief Paediatrician



MALCOLM COUTTS

It was 20 years ago that I came into Ronald McDonald House Charities as the first full-time national staff member. I believe was first full time employee of RMHC outside of the USA. Of course there were local House managers, but nobody was running RMHC. I had joined the navy earlier in my career and had a strong sense of service, and an enjoyment of independence. So this job ticked many boxes.

When I first came on board there were six Ronald McDonald Houses. We didn't have any Family Retreats, or any Family Rooms or the Learning Program, just had six great Houses. We are now finishing the building of building our 17th. Plus, we have relocations and almost every House has had an extension or a re-build since then. It's not always appreciated that the Learning Program and the Family Retreats were Australian originals. The Family Rooms idea came out of the USA but we were early adopters and have really got on with it.

Because of this and so much more, I have loved the variety and meaning of the work that we do at RMHC. I have always known how lucky I am to have a job that has real personal meaning. To be able to come to work and create programs that are vitally important to our community (just check some of the testimonials from senior medical experts in this annual report) has been very special. I have also benefited from the passion and support that McDonalds Australia has always had for the Charity. We have been fortunate to be underpinned by its financial strength and long term passion of its franchisees.

It is a very good time to hand over the reins of the organisation. It is in great shape and we are still growing and facing new challenges. A new team can go ahead and try new things.

The new CEO Barbara Ryan is the perfect leader for this organisation, but she will never tell you that. She is too modest. From her clinical experience as a physiotherapist, to being a hospital policy expert, to her experience with the Royal Flying Doctors and, of course, her eight years with RMHC, she is an excellent fit for this role. Barbara is very clever, very open and is going to do great things.

Farewell, and thank you to all of the RMHC staff, volunteers, Board members, McDonald's staff, sponsors and donors. With your continued support Ronald McDonald House Charities will continue to grow its vital offer of support to families with seriously ill children.

OUTGOING CEO



INCOMING CEO

## BARBARA RYAN

For two decades of growth, inspiration, leadership and advocacy, we salute you Malcolm Coutts. The shoes that must be filled in your absence are almost as large as Ronald McDonald's, but I will do my best.

This is a truly exciting opportunity and I am buoyed by the support I have already received across the system. As well as continuing to manage and fund the massive growth that Ronald McDonald House Charities has been experiencing over the last few years, we will be creating a new level of collaboration across the Charity. What can the national office do for the House Chapters and Programs? What can we do less of and what can we do more of?

My goal is to develop a new understanding of the Charity in its entirety, then work out how we need to grow as we head into the future. This will be done in full consultation with every part of the Charity and with all of our supporters. We look forward to greater engagement between the House Chapters and RMHC as our partnership with McDonald's Australia goes from strength to strength and we will continue to remain relevant and an integral part of the Australian medical landscape.

From all of us at RMHC we thank you for your donations and ongoing support. With our much needed growth your help is more important than ever before.



EVERY DAY IS A CELEBRATION FOR OUR LITTLE HEROES.



## OUR PROGRAMS

### Ronald McDonald Houses

There are now 16 Ronald McDonald Houses in Australia accommodating over 8000 families annually.

### Ronald McDonald Learning Programs

Australia's leading educational catch-up program helps over 1200 families and their children every week. Over 20,000 health and education professionals have benefited from the EDMed Professional Development Program since 2009.

### Ronald McDonald Family Rooms

Over 230,000 visits to the 15 Ronald McDonald Family Rooms in Australian hospitals every year allowing families to take a break and relax in a homely environment.

### Ronald McDonald Family Retreats

When a family needs time to recover and reconnect, Ronald McDonald Family Retreats offer them the special family holiday time they need. Over 1600 nights of holiday accommodation are provided each year.

### Ronald McDonald Care Mobiles

The clinical specialists coordinated by Royal Far West have been busier than ever in 2015, serving 1685 children in remote regions of NSW. The Ronald McDonald Care Mobile's many services include hearing and dental screenings and speech assessments.

### RMHC Grants

Over the life of RMHC more than \$4.8 million in grants has been provided to services that help seriously ill children and their families. Australia's three public Cord Blood Banks have RMHC as their major private funder. Eleven Charlie Bell Scholarships of \$5000 are awarded each year to deserving young people who have recovered from serious illness.



CHILDREN MAKE HEROES AND BECOME HEROES!





Independent academic research has proven the power, effectiveness and necessity of the Ronald McDonald House Charities programs. Throughout this Annual Impact Report we illustrate specific research by referencing real-life experiences, from families with seriously ill children to RMHC staff and volunteers working to help those families, and from businesses supporting the Charity to the medical establishment itself. Along the way we discover the breadth of Ronald McDonald House Charities, which has helped over 200,000 families since 1981.

## RMHC HELPS FAMILIES BY REDUCING STRESS AND FINANCIAL BURDENS

Two peer-reviewed research articles revealed that Ronald McDonald Houses support a family's ability to stay together when their sick child requires medical treatment and, in doing so, reduces family's stress and anxiety. RMHC does this by providing safe, clean and comfortable accommodation, close to or within the hospital, for families during their greatest time of need. We also offer short breaks away from the ward with our Ronald McDonald Family Rooms, time to recover and bond with our Ronald McDonald Family Retreats (see below) and much more.



### HOLIDAY OF A LIFETIME

How many times have you said, "I need a holiday"? Imagine how real this need would be if your child had just been through a battle with a serious illness. Sydney dad Mick, whose son Leo suffers from a rare and severe lung condition and who has been a frequent user of the Ronald McDonald Family Room in Randwick's Sydney Children's Hospital, recently enjoyed his first week away with his family at the Ronald McDonald Family Retreat in Batemans Bay.

**Q. After such a long time in hospital, how did it feel to be away from it all?**

A. It was amazing, like paradise. We were very ready for a break. We were drained mentally, emotionally and financially. Without the Family Retreat we never could have afforded a break.

**Q. Did the time away make a difference to your family?**

A. It made an enormous difference. After the first day we were all just very chilled for the first time in a long time. There were no schedules and no alarm clocks. We ate when we were hungry and went to the beach when we were hot. Most importantly, we had time together as a family without distractions. And believe it or not, Leo seemed to improve while we were away.

**Q. What if the Family Retreat didn't exist?**

A. There's only so much you can do in Sydney when you have no money. You're stuck at home, and the kids get bored and grumpy. The break just helped us all to relax and be together. We actually had tears in our eyes as we began driving home.



“This place truly has been unbelievable,” says Andrew, a dad who stayed at Ronald McDonald House Townsville when his partner gave birth prematurely. “The staff and volunteers and other people staying in the House really are there for you. Without it I would have been living on a couch at my partner’s hospital bedside or in a tent in the scrub somewhere nearby.”



RONALD MCDONALD  
HOUSE

*reduces stress*



*& financial burden*

& FOR FAMILIES

when they are far from home



and accessing medical  
care for their child.\*



\*Daniel et al. Rural and Remote Health (2013)







Less than 12 months after the crippling loss of their one-year-old son Cash, Jodi and her husband were back at Ronald McDonald House Townsville looking after their daughter Kennedy, born 15 weeks premature. "Near the end of our five-month stay and 100 days in hospital, we know this time we have our happy ending ... we will be taking our baby home," Jodi said. "We will never forget Ronald McDonald House, our home away from home."

## FAMILY PROXIMITY TO THE HOSPITAL PROVIDES IMPORTANT PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS

Research results published in *Family, Systems & Health* (2013) concluded that families staying close to the hospital are provided important benefits for the family experience, for their psychological well-being and for their perceptions of child recovery. A Ronald McDonald House enables these benefits for families.



“There was a 48-hour period where the medical staff were preparing us for things to go either way,” says Madeline, a mum who stayed at Ronald McDonald House Randwick when one of her twin boys was diagnosed with a potentially fatal illness. “Had those been our last moments with Harry, I would have been horrified to think that (Harry’s twin brother) Patrick could not have been there with us. What Ronald McDonald House gave us was the space to be a family during what could have been the last moments of what we knew was our family. You can’t really put a price on what they provided.”



A STUDY  
OF OVER

2000



FAMILY MEMBERS

CONFIRMED THAT STAYING CLOSE TO THE HOSPITAL

reported benefits for the  
*family experience,*



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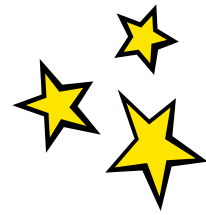


\*Franck et al., *Families, Systems, & Health* (2013)



## OUR NEW BUILDS

In 2015 two new Ronald McDonald Houses opened their doors after being custom-built from scratch to house our little superheroes and their families. Welcome to the Houses that love built.



### RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE PERTH



First opening its doors on December 9 in 2015, the new Ronald McDonald House Perth welcomed 71 families in the three weeks before the end of the year.

Having increased in size from 18 rooms in the old House to 47 rooms in the new building, the House can accommodate a total of 220 people each night. Where other Houses typically supply a cooked dinner once or twice each week, Ronald McDonald House Perth aims to have volunteers cooking up a feast for families in need every single night of the week.

It takes 180 volunteers to keep the House running smoothly. Those volunteers have been grouped into various new roles including:

- 'FABS' - Family ambassadors
- 'Fabbie Cabbies' - Shuttle bus drivers
- 'Domestic Gods & Goddesses' - Cleaning team
- 'Team Rise n Shine' - Laundry
- 'Ed Heads' - Educational assistance
- 'Dinner Squad' - Dinner service
- 'Movie Mates' - Movie night volunteers
- 'FRoomies' - Family Room volunteers



## RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE ORANGE

The first family stayed at Ronald McDonald House Orange on April 24 and since then over 100 families have found comfort under our roof. Around 20% of families stay for between 31 to 90 days. This is what one of those families had to say:

“ I was in the process of making up a bed in the back of my car when I received a call from Alison at Ronald McDonald House asking me what time I would be checking in. The relief I felt was enormous knowing that I would have somewhere safe and warm to sleep but still be able to be close to my son. I cried for close to ten minutes when I got off the phone ...

Ronald McDonald House is so much more than a safe place to stay. It's a home where tired and exhausted parents can find refuge, comfort and the strength to face another day.

## Orange House - Stats &amp; Facts

- Volunteers - 146
- Volunteer hours in 2015 - 8692
- Projected volunteer hours in 2016 - 14604
- Average length of stay for families with children in the Child & Adolescent Mental Health Unit - 3 weeks
- Families accommodated so far - 57



## RMHC HELPS IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR CHILDREN AND CAREGIVERS

In a survey of 250 families, researchers found that children and their parents who stayed at a Ronald McDonald House had a better perceived quality of life than expected for children with chronic diseases.

### VIEW FROM THE FRONT LINE

**Tamara Angus, Guest Services Coordinator at Ronald McDonald House South-East Queensland, has been with the Charity for almost five years. Every day she sees first-hand the difference that Ronald McDonald House makes to the lives of families.**

**Q. How do families react to the support they receive at the House?**

A. Families often arrive in pyjamas and barefoot having experienced a traumatic event, from an accident to a diagnosis, to a baby who couldn't wait to arrive. We give them a bed, a shower, toiletries and food. Families are constantly surprised that we can provide so much for them. Perhaps most importantly, our onsite staff and volunteers are able to offer a smile and some hope when things appear bleak.

**Q. Is the emotional support as important as the physical?**

A. Our Guest Services area offers support for both emotional and financial needs. Many a tear has been shed in the office while a parent relays their experiences, and we're a shoulder to cry on. Once, three years after a family's initial visit, they returned and thanked me for being there for them when their baby had passed away. Sometimes we have no idea of the impact we have on people's lives.

**Q. What do the families value the most?**

A. The reduction in stress is often commented on. After spending yet another day at the hospital, to be able to come back to a home-cooked meal, a comfortable bed and a place where they know people understand what they're going through, families say is of immeasurable value.

**Q. How is the House important for the quality of life of the siblings of the seriously ill child?**

A. Keeping families together when they face months away from home makes such a difference. Siblings could get lost in this process. They miss home, friends and school. We offer lots of activities for children and the opportunity for the siblings to do creative and fun things away from the hospitals. One little boy whose family were guests when he was born returned to the house two years later when his sibling was born. His mum commented on how much he had come out of his shell while he was here. He was talking more and interacting with the staff. She couldn't thank us enough for taking the time to interact with him and make him comfortable enough to grow.





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\*Archivos Argentinos de Pediatría (2014).





## RONALD MCDONALD HOUSES HELP STRENGTHEN FAMILY COPING ABILITIES


Staying at a Ronald McDonald House and utilising its programs supports families to cope. In a research study, 'support from family and friends' was identified as the most important ingredient in the development of a positive coping strategy.



“Amelia and Sam were able to come to the hospital after school and spend time with their sister Sofia in her room, then they happily went off to the Family Room to do their homework,” says Kath, a mum whose daughter was injured during an accident and who utilised the Ronald McDonald Family Room at Sydney’s Royal North Shore Hospital. “Later on we would eat dinner together in the Family Room, rather than being separated due to our situation. This meant our family could be together the whole time. And when Sofia was finally allowed out of bed after six days, we wheeled her into the Family Room for dinner. That was the first time I saw her smile since the accident.”

Families are able to  
*cope better*

& focus on the needs of the  
*sick child*

 when they  
have support

from family members  
and other families



\*Nabors et al., *Families, Systems, & Health* (2013)



“The girls never coped well when we were apart,” says Carla, a mum who stayed at Ronald McDonald House Perth, with three daughters aged six, five and three, as well as her seriously ill two-year-old boy. “They worried a lot and originally I didn’t understand why. It has been especially difficult for our six-year-old because she is old enough to understand how serious things are. Her brother is in a high-risk category for sudden death. She is scared for her brother, and she sees her mum and dad being scared, too. I realised she is scared of not being around to say goodbye to her brother if he died.”

