



Ronald McDonald  
House Charities®  
VIC & TAS

# Here WHEN YOU NEED US.

OUR IMPACT  
IN 2024





A woman with brown hair is smiling and holding a baby. The baby is wearing a white knitted sweater and a white bib with a colorful floral pattern. The woman is wearing a light-colored top. In the background, there are large pink and white balloons with pink streamers. The scene appears to be outdoors, possibly on a patio or balcony.

“

Having a grandchild in hospital undergoing chemotherapy is so challenging and as grandparents you feel a sense of powerlessness. Ronald McDonald House helped us provide some sense of normalcy outside the hospital environment. We were able to cook meals, do washing, and help with day-to-day living while our son and his wife concentrated on their little daughter. Meeting other families in similar situations gave us courage and a sense of connectedness which was vital. We couldn't do much but we could provide a 'home away from home' situation thanks to the wonderful staff at Ronald McDonald House.

— *Caroline, Ava's grandmother.*





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Ronald McDonald House Charities would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands, skies and waterways on which we work. We recognise the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples amongst the families we care for, our employees, volunteers and supporters, who form part of the oldest continuous living culture on Earth. We pay our respects to them and their Elders past and present.

Ronald McDonald House Charities values and promotes an inclusive workplace where everyone, from any background, can feel valued, be appreciated and do their best work. At our place, everyone regardless of gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, age, neurodiversity, disability status, citizenship or any other aspect that makes them unique can contribute to improving the health and wellbeing of children and their families.

# A message

## from Board Chair and CEO

AS WE REFLECT ON ANOTHER YEAR, WE ARE FILLED WITH A SENSE OF PRIDE, PURPOSE, AND GRATITUDE. ACROSS THE ORGANISATION, WE HAVE REMAINED STEADFAST IN OUR COMMITMENT TO FAMILY-CENTRED CARE FOR FAMILIES WITH SERIOUSLY ILL AND INJURED CHILDREN REQUIRING SPECIALIST PAEDIATRIC HOSPITAL CARE IN VICTORIA AND TASMANIA.

This past year was one of mission-focused growth, where we prioritised delivering the best programs we could to support the families in our care. In the following pages, you'll read about some of our service highlights which include the Sunshine Hospital Family Room reopening, 50 years of Ronald McDonald House Charities Global celebrations and some inspirational words from the families we serve.

We also welcomed new faces to our staff and volunteer teams, enabling us to meet the ever-increasing needs of the families we support. This expansion of our diverse and experienced team is essential to addressing the healthcare and educational challenges of our community, as well as securing the increased funding necessary to keep our programs running efficiently.

Across the year, we hosted a variety of events to raise vital funds to support our programs. These included our annual Golf Day, Dance for Sick Kids, Gala Balls across Victoria and Tasmania, and the expansion of Ride for Sick Kids through the Spin Challenge. These events were embraced by the community, and we are immensely proud of the outpouring of support and fundraising.

It's through this unwavering support of the community that our programs can succeed, and this past year was no exception. A heartfelt thank you to every member of our community who donated their time, energy, or funds to ensure the families who rely on Ronald McDonald House Charities Victoria & Tasmania have somewhere to turn. Your support is the foundation of the House and brings hope to more people than you'll ever know.

We often hear people say that they didn't truly understand the importance of the services we offer until they experienced it firsthand. As we move into the new year, we remain committed to being there for families when they need us, well into the future.



**GARRY THOMPSON**  
Chairman



**PETER BISHOP**  
Chief Executive Officer





**FAMILY FEEDBACK:**

**89.6%**

said staying at a House helped to support their overall well-being, even though they had a child in hospital.

4.8% no response



# Our mission, vision and values

## Our Mission

To support the ever-changing needs of seriously ill children and their families.

## Our Vision

Ronald McDonald House Charities strives to achieve the best outcomes for families by reducing the impact of their child's serious illness.

## Our Values

Our values underpin all that we do.



**C**ollaboration



**H**igh Quality



**I**ntegrity



**L**oyalty



**D**iversity

## Family Centred Framework

Keeping Families Close is at the heart of all we do.

When your child is diagnosed with a serious illness, it's often the most traumatic time of your life and involves the entire family embarking on an uncertain path into the future. Through our programs, we enable families to stay close together, so that they have the support of loved ones throughout their journey.

Our 2024 Impact Report celebrates the special moments in each day. The memories these families gather along the way and the milestones they achieve, however large or small, while they are supported by Ronald McDonald House Charities®.



# Charlie and Kiri



Charlie was just three weeks old when his Mum Kiri, a training paramedic and nurse, realised something was wrong. Her happy little boy became lethargic and clammy, struggling to swallow milk. Within just two hours, he became critically unwell.

Kiri and her husband Luke trusted her instincts and training and made the frantic hour-long journey to Hobart hospital.

Her instincts proved right; as they arrived at the hospital, Charlie's eyes deviated, and he went into respiratory arrest. He was placed in a coma with ventilation support. Charlie was diagnosed with pneumococcal disease, which had led to both septicaemia and meningitis. This diagnosis meant that doctors were able to begin treatment to save his life.

Charlie spent five long days in a coma before his condition improved enough that he could be taken off the ventilator. However, his journey was far from over, and he needed to spend a further four weeks in the hospital.

Thankfully, during this time, Kiri and Luke were able to stay nearby at Ronald McDonald House Hobart.

With their home and support system being far away, Kiri reflected on what the House meant for them during this time, saying...

*"Ronald McDonald House was the only normality we had as a family during this time."*

Now four years old, Charlie has recovered from his traumatic illness but requires ongoing check-ups to monitor his health.

With the continued support of the community, Ronald McDonald House Charities Victoria & Tasmania can ensure the family has a safe place to call home, whenever they need it.



# 50 years of RMHC

A MILESTONE ANNIVERSARY FOR RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE CHARITIES GLOBAL AND THE FAMILIES WE SUPPORT.

In October 2024, RMHC Global celebrated 50 years of operations and providing essential support for families. This milestone allowed us to reflect on our legacy and the core tenets of our work; family-centred care and connection to our community.

As part of our local celebrations, we honoured the founder of the first Ronald McDonald House, Dr. Audrey Evans. Dr. Evans was an accomplished paediatric oncologist who revolutionised treatment for neuroblastoma cancer. She took a total-care approach towards her patients, treating not just their physical needs but their social, emotional, and spiritual needs as well.

During her career, Dr. Evans treated children who travelled long distances for her expertise and knowledge. She noticed that the families of these patients often had nowhere to stay and would be separated during their child's treatment.

Dr. Evans saw an opportunity to extend her approach by focusing not only on the child, but also on their family's care. To turn this vision into a reality, she partnered with local McDonald's

operators and the Philadelphia Eagles to fundraise and purchase a house near the hospital where the families of her patients could stay.

This house would become the very first Ronald McDonald House.

In the 50 years since, Ronald McDonald House Charities has expanded to offer more than 1,000 programs in 62 countries and regions around the world, positively impacting millions of sick kids and families.

Global celebrations were held in Chicago in July 2024, where our own Chief Executive Officer, Peter Bishop received one of three inaugural Dr. Audrey Evans Leadership Impact Awards.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who has played a part in the past 50 years of supporting families. With this legacy and continued guidance of strong leadership, we look forward to the next 50 years - working together as a community to meet the ever-changing needs of sick children and their families.



Left: Audrey's Children is a new film based on the achievements and hard work of Dr. Audrey Evans., debuts in American theatres March 2025.  
Middle: 50th anniversary celebrations at Ronald McDonald House North Fitzroy at Casa Elda Vaccari.  
Right CEO, Peter Bishop receiving Dr. Audrey Evans Leadership Impact Award





# We're here for families

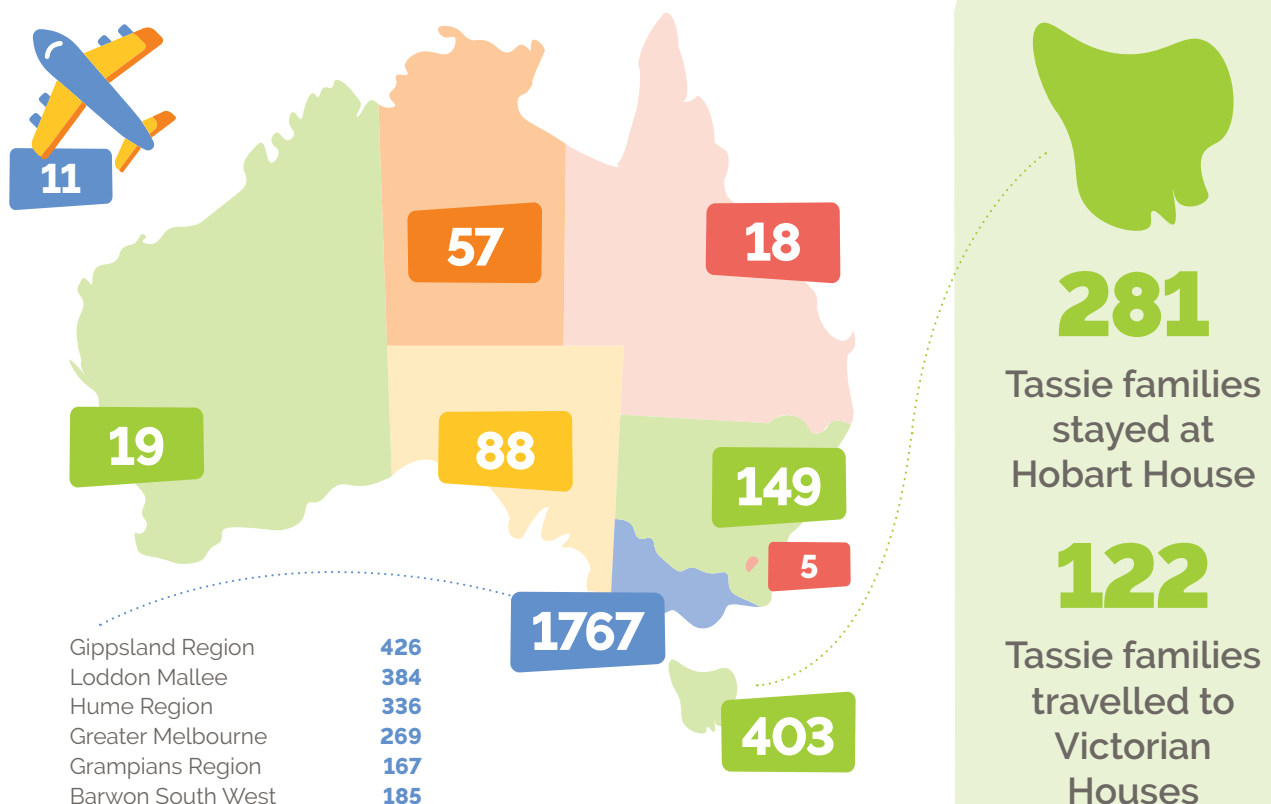
WHEN A CHILD IS SICK, FAMILIES OFTEN NEED TO TRAVEL LARGE DISTANCES FOR THE SPECIALIST TREATMENT THEIR CHILD NEEDS.

Being away from home, work, and support systems brings with it numerous practical, financial and emotional barriers. These barriers are felt whether a family is coming from regional Victoria and Tasmania, an hour away or from across the country.

No matter where they are from, staying at one of the Ronald McDonald Houses helps alleviate some of these pressures by providing free and comfortable accommodation moments away from the hospital.


Families have access to warm nutritious meals, laundry services, a like-minded community and other essential programs.

In our Houses, families can focus on the health and recovery of their child – while we take care of everything else.





# Top 10 diagnoses



Neonatal premature birth .....	<b>24%</b>
Cardiac .....	<b>15%</b>
ENT .....	<b>11.5%</b>
Neurological .....	<b>11.5%</b>
Gastrointestinal .....	<b>8%</b>
Oncology .....	<b>7.5%</b>
Orthopaedic .....	<b>6.5%</b>
Respiratory .....	<b>6.5%</b>
Antenatal .....	<b>6%</b>
Renal .....	<b>3.5%</b>

Our warm and supportive home-away-from-home provides the whole family with a comfortable place to stay while their child is undergoing treatment at nearby hospitals.

The Houses foster community spirit, where families connect with other families going through similar experiences.

Practicalities of everyday life are also taken care of, from meals to bed linen, as well as addressing the educational needs of both patients and their siblings.

#### FAMILY FEEDBACK:

## 93.2%

were able to actively participate in their child's care as a result of staying at a RMHC VIC & TAS House.



# Mending broken hearts

WHEN HANNAH AND CAYDEN'S FAMILY NEEDED HELP, RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE WAS THERE.

Hannah and Cayden from St Helens in Tasmania were overjoyed to discover they were having another baby.

Soon-to-be big brother, Eli was beyond excited to know he was going to have a new baby sister or brother. He'd soon have someone else to talk to about his beloved dinosaurs.



That joy was shaken when Hannah went for her routine scan in Launceston.

*"At the 20-week scan, they couldn't quite see a certain part of the baby's heart, so they sent us [to Hobart] to a bigger hospital, just to make sure. We went, thinking, I'm sure it's nothing. They just couldn't see it properly in that scan."*

In Hobart, the usual 20-minute scan took two hours.

*"They had an idea of what it could be, but still being so small in that position, they weren't 100% sure."*

Referred to The Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, the family arrived feeling shell-shocked. They were away from home, missed their support system and uncertain of what was ahead.

Thankfully, they were able to rely on Ronald McDonald House North Fitzroy at Casa Elda Vaccari.

Little Mack was born on Boxing Day. Hannah and Cayden were able to hold their new bundle of joy for a moment and snap a quick photo, before he was whisked away to intensive care.

*"He essentially had half a working heart, the right-hand side of his heart is deformed... two valves just didn't work," said Cayden.*

Their precious, little boy had no way of getting blood to his lungs to be oxygenated.

*"He was straight onto oxygen and a tube was inserted to connect to his lungs."*

The first few weeks were intense and frightening.

*"We'd arrive at the hospital at nine in the morning and get back at nine at night," he said.*

The family recalls the support they received during this time at the House "Everyone cares. Everyone wants to lend a hand wherever they can."





Five seemingly eternal weeks later, little Mack could join his family at Ronald McDonald House, staying close to the hospital for the many day visits to the hospital that lay ahead.

Having formed relationships with other families at the House, everyone was thrilled to see the little one join his family. This new supportive community was more than willing to pitch in and help however they could. Cayden remembers one night when Mack had a terrible case of colic.

*"He was just crying all night. One of the mums in the neighbouring room knocked on the door in the middle of the night, asking, 'Is there anything I can do? Can I just give you a break?'"*

Eli also looked forward to his daily hour of school in the Learning Centre, to help him keep up with his learning.

*"Eli being able to play and not be stuck with us all the time meant I didn't have to worry about him, I knew he was going to be safe within the House and the lovely staff always showed excitement to see Eli, which makes him feel special."*

Hannah recalls the financial impact of their stay: *"It meant we could still afford our mortgage back home. We're not sure what we would have done without Ronald McDonald House."*

After more open-heart surgery and a total of 245 nights at Ronald McDonald House North Fitzroy at Casa Elda Vaccari, the family was able to go home, and Mack could finally meet the rest of his family.

We spoke with Hannah recently to see how Mack is progressing.

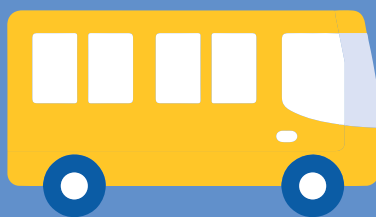
*"He's going great! He's walking now and growing well; he still has more surgery this year but we aren't sure when yet. We are happy to be home now and looking forward to watching our strong, happy little man grow up!"*

# Impact of your support



**2,369**

families stayed  
at our Houses



**2,876**

shuttle bus trips  
for families



**397**

longest stay  
of nights



**8.1**

nights average  
length of stay



**29,472**

nights of accommodation and support for  
families with children in hospital

## FAMILY FEEDBACK:

**85.6%**

said staying at a House helped keep their family  
close while child received treatment. 10.4% no response



# Learning Program

WE BELIEVE THAT EVERY SCHOOL AGED CHILD HAS THE RIGHT TO ACHIEVE TO THEIR FULL POTENTIAL – AND WE HELP THEM REALISE THIS.

Tailored to every student's individual needs, the Ronald McDonald Learning Program helps school-aged children with serious illnesses and injuries to catch up on their education after treatment and recovery.

We provide a suite of educational support services, including therapy sessions and one-on-one tutorials with experienced teachers, to help build each child's confidence and self-esteem.



**350**

students assisted through Learning Program



**16**

tutored through the sibling Pilot Program



**105**

dedicated tutors



**14**

students participated in RMHC Australia's mentoring program



**45**

Year 12 exam preparation sessions booked across **16** VCE subjects



**250**

Early Years education sessions delivered



**65**

Bridge the Gap students engaged in over **674** hours of tutoring



**88**

Holiday Program activities delivered to **336** students



**94**

students attended the Youth Forum



**135**

Learning Centre sessions held at North Fitzroy House at Casa Elda Vaccari

# Inspiring strength

## ONE FAMILY TELLS THEIR STORY OF RESILIENCE AND SUPPORT.

Bianca and Neil understand first-hand what it's like to have a sick child. Sadly, for the family, two of their three boys have both required extensive medical treatment.

The family share their story of strength, resilience, and gratitude towards the supporters of Ronald McDonald House who helped them throughout their journey.

As Bianca writes

*"Two of my three boys have incredibly rare medical conditions. Ironically, the conditions are not related, but both need ongoing, intensive treatment.*

*Jayden has most of his treatments at Monash Children's Hospital, and Connor has his at The Royal Children's Hospital, so it's a big juggle.*

*Thankfully, the Ronald McDonald Family Room at Monash gave us some respite - we could get a coffee, have a quiet rest and even get our laundry done.*

*I was always so very grateful I could do that. It may seem little, but it was such a huge help.*

*During my other son Connor's treatment, we stayed at the Ronald McDonald House Parkville, which was a huge help as it meant we weren't travelling back and forth every day.*

*When you're in the House with other families, you naturally start talking, making connections and you form a bond. If there's a family there with a little one who has a rare condition, you automatically form a bond that's almost one of isolation and solidarity - in that they're one of the few people who really understand.*

*You can just see if it's been a tough and exhausting day; food gets shared around, you end up looking after each other, often without words. It happens quickly, and it's really touching when it does.*

*It was Connor who first made use of the Ronald McDonald Learning Program. He was struggling, deconditioning, and he was missing a lot of school. The program was great for him.*

*After my son Jayden had multiple admissions and deconditioned quite severely, he missed a year of school. I didn't even need to reach out about the Ronald McDonald Learning Program - the beautiful Liz from the Program called to check on Connor. She heard what was happening with Jayden and offered the Bridge the Gap program for him. It was all so easy, thankfully.*

*When Jayden was in rehab, and we were really struggling, again Ronald McDonald House Monash stepped in and accommodation was made available for us.*

*But, as I say, here are other families doing it tougher than us. Life happens, and we just have to deal with it. We try to still find joy in the little things, and we still have each other.*

*In amongst all of this, Ronald McDonald House Charities Victoria & Tasmania also gave us access to the Family Retreat in Cape Patterson as donated by Ingenia Holidays. Going away for the weekend was something we hadn't done for such a long time. The beach is a happy place for us. The team has organised a beach wheelchair, had go-karts for the boys, so the boys, including my eldest, Dylan, all had such a great time. The weekend also happened to coincide with Neil's birthday and our wedding anniversary, so it was a truly special weekend for all of us.*

*We are just so very grateful that Ronald McDonald House Charities Victoria & Tasmania has been in our lives and that they've been so supportive of us."*



# Bridge the gap

The Bridge the Gap Program aims to support students who medically cannot go to school, and cannot access education support as an outpatient at major Children's Hospitals.

*"The Children's Cancer Centre at The Royal Children's Hospital (Melbourne) referred twenty-four patients to the Bridge the Gap program in 2024. Our referrals ranged in age and diagnosis, but all had the common goal of staying connected to education in a time when they did not have medical clearance to physically attend school and were no longer able to access education services at the hospital. The Bridge the Gap program was true to its name.*

*For patients who had already faced so much adversity and had an increased risk of school disengagement because of long-term hospitalisation, the online tutoring was a vehicle to bridge the gap between hospital and school and anchor students to a successful transition back to the classroom. The brilliant Bridge the Gap team supported the Children's Cancer Centre team with numerous school transition meetings and continual liaising to best support the patient's learning and wellbeing. The RCH Children's Cancer Centre is incredibly grateful for the support that this program has provided our patients, but also for the security that it has given us as a team knowing there is a service available to support our patients' transition to life outside the hospital."*

**Ianthie McKay, Education and Vocation Liaison Officer, Children's Cancer Centre, The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne.**

Below: Jayden, Bianca and Connor.



# Thank you to our generous Learning Program supporters

- Access Education
- Barbara Howlett
- Cake Angels
- Collier Charitable Fund, a donor of Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation
- Denise & Ellis Richardson
- Edrolo
- Fire Fly Education
- Freemasons Foundation Victoria
- Freemasons Gregorios Lodge
- Learnmate Tutoring
- Lions Club of Carnegie
- Makers Empire
- Nelson Alexander Charitable Foundation
- The Pierce Armstrong Foundation

# Early years learning

EVOLVING OUR PROGRAMS TO SUIT THE EVERY-CHANGING NEEDS OF THE FAMILIES IN OUR CARE IS ALWAYS A PRIORITY. IN 2024, THIS MEANT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE RONALD MCDONALD EARLY YEARS PROGRAM ACROSS OUR VICTORIAN HOUSES.

Thanks to generous funding from the Freemasons Foundation Victoria, we successfully expanded our service footprint to support children aged three to five with regular access to early years education sessions. The sessions are tailored to meet the range of early learning needs, ensuring continued learning in readiness for school.

The Pilot was run at Ronald McDonald Houses North Fitzroy and Parkville and the Family Room at Monash Children's Hospital. More than 230 children attended the early years sessions, which provided a fun and stimulating learning opportunity for patients and their siblings. Seventy percent of children who attended were patients, with 30 percent being siblings of patients.

The tailored learnings cover the gamut of early learning needs: letter names and corresponding sounds, development of socialisation skills, having a thorough understanding of numbers 0-20, plus continued learning in readiness for school.

By participating in sessions, the goal was for children to feel more equipped and confident when returning to their local kindergarten or starting school. Our Early Years Educators also provided valuable advice for parents around kindergartens, early years and school enrollment.

On top of teaching foundational skills for children, the sessions also provided a welcome break and distraction from days on ward for patients and siblings alike.

Parents expressed their gratitude for the sense of normality the program offers their child. The program has very quickly become well respected by staff, health professionals and parents.

We are thrilled to continue the Early Years Program into 2025, thanks to the Freemasons Foundation Victoria.

*"Thanks for providing us the information for this program and allowing Lily (2.5years) to attend. She really enjoys attending the sessions with Amanda. It's also a nice change from staying in our room all day as we wait for Charlie's surgery. From observing Amanda interact/play with the children, I've also taken away new ideas for learning through play that we can do in our own time too!"*

– Nhu Tran, parent

*"The RMHC Early Years Empowerment Pilot Project has provided invaluable support to Aurora during her 7 week stay in hospital. She really enjoyed her time attending the sessions and getting her learning back on track after a slight detour due to her medical condition. The Kinder sessions allowed Aurora to interact with other kids and have a form of normalcy during her hospital stay. Amanda's dedication to teaching really shone through with the confident way she navigated each student's unique medical situation, education level, and skills."* – Zach Clarke, parent





## A Foundation prioritising enduring impact

Freemasons Foundation Victoria (FFV) have a range of ways they fund worthy causes across the state; through a Scholarship Program, their Masonic Grants where they add to funds raised by their lodges for enduring impact programs, and their Community Grants.

The Community Grants program was set up to specifically help more people in need, improving the lives of people in Victoria. Their main focus is to create enduring impact and they do this through supporting education, mental health and food programs.

RMHC VIC & TAS believe that the Early Years Pilot Program truly serves parents in their time of need, taking the pressure off, especially when there are other siblings involved. Why should those kids miss out on a part of their education when they're already going through so much?

We are so grateful to Freemasons Foundation Victoria for allowing the Early Years Program pilot to continue into 2025, as well as the additional support they have offered including the Pet Therapy program. We hope to continue working together into the future.



Garry James Chairman, Amanda Acutt Freemasons Foundation Victoria Early Years Educator, Rodney Lavin Immediate Past Chair, Matthew Scholfield Deputy Chairman.

# Holiday programs

AT RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE CHARITIES, WE STRIVE TO CREATE MOMENTS OF JOY AND RESPITE FOR FAMILIES NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF BEING AWAY FROM HOME DURING DIFFICULT TIMES.



Our Holiday Program was born out of a recognition of the gap in the experiences of families staying in-House. While the Learning Program offers enriching classes during the school term, it became clear that families were missing opportunities to escape the reality of their circumstances during school holiday periods.

The Holiday Program was designed to address this need, providing families with a much-needed break from the hospital visits and appointments that often define their routines. Its primary objective is to offer moments of respite, joy, and togetherness, helping families create positive memories even in the midst of the most difficult of times.

During 2024, the program offered an array of activities led by our talented Learning Program team and supported by the generosity of our partners.

Families enjoyed creative projects such as T-shirt making, coaster decorating, and crafting their very own pot plants. Thanks to the kindness of our supporters, we were also able to provide music therapy sessions, live wildlife shows, engaging brickworks incursions, and the ever-popular petting zoos. These activities brought smiles, laughter, and a sense of normalcy to families during their stay.

The impact of the Holiday Program is profound. By offering these engaging and meaningful activities, we help families experience joy and connection, even amidst difficult circumstances. As we look ahead, we hope to expand the program further, bringing light and positivity to even more families during their stays.







# Charlie Bell Scholarships

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO EXCEL AND FLOURISH AFTER ADVERSITY.

The Ronald McDonald House Charities Charlie Bell Scholarship is an exciting and unique program that provides seriously ill young people the opportunity to flourish in their future endeavours. The scholarship honours Charlie Bell, the first Australian Global CEO of McDonald's who sadly passed away after his own experience with illness.

His legacy allows young people who have experienced serious illness or injury to get their life back on track and follow their dreams. Here at Ronald McDonald House Charities Victoria & Tasmania, we are privileged to provide this scholarship annually and excited to announce our 2024 recipients.



## Caleb

Caleb has endured both medical and learning adversities. Due to ongoing treatment and appointments for his gastroenterology, endocrinology and developmental diagnoses, he experienced a significantly interrupted education. Despite this, Caleb has remained focused and driven to pursue his career dreams and community involvement.

Caleb is extremely passionate and curious about the natural world. Caleb will be studying a double

degree at Deakin University in Science and the Arts, majoring in History & Environmental Science – in particular Meteorology & Earth research.

Caleb will be using his RMHC Charlie Bell Scholarship for additional tuition, textbooks, and travel to and from university. The scholarship will also lessen the burden of part-time work requirements, allowing Caleb to focus on his studies and continue to give back to his community.

## Imogen

No stranger to adversity, Imogen is a remarkable young lady who has managed multiple serious health conditions throughout her life. Diagnosed with serious oncology, neurology, and cardiology conditions before the age of 14, Imogen has, and continues, to manage the demands of her health with her academic pursuits.

Imogen has always been passionate about science and is currently in her 2nd year of a Bachelor of Applied Science. Imogen is aiming to complete postgraduate study after her Science course in Medicine and/or Immunology. She hopes this will lead her into study and work in the research field of organ transplantation and rejection. Imogen will be using her RMHC Charlie Bell Scholarship to support her fees and textbook requirements.







## Chloe

Chloe has a passion for the environment and science, in particular, environmental sustainability.

At age nine, Chloe was diagnosed with major Gastroenterology challenges, resulting in significant admissions in hospital. Her condition is life-long and can be unpredictable and debilitating.

Despite significant medical absences in Chloe's final four years of schooling, she remained determined, focused and resilient. Chloe worked exceptionally hard to try to keep up with her peers and successfully completed her VCE.

Chloe is passionate about the environment and hopes to be able to combine her love for engineering and science to make meaningful contributions to the preservation of the environment for future generations.

Chloe will be starting a double degree at Monash University for engineering and science in March 2025. Chloe will be using her RMHC Charlie Bell Scholarship to assist with the cost of tuition fees and study materials. The scholarship will also lessen the burden of work requirements, allowing Chloe to focus more on her studies and health management.

## A RMHC Charlie Bell success story: Hanna

Hanna, a past Charlie Bell Scholarship recipient, recently graduated from RMIT in December. She successfully completed a Certificate IV in Professional Writing and Editing – using the proceeds of her Scholarship to pay for it.

When Hanna was younger, she was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia and was in

treatment for three years at The Royal Children's Hospital. On her 10th birthday she found out she was in remission – a birthday present she'll never forget.

Hanna and her family have relied on the support of Ronald McDonald House Charities Victoria & Tasmania over the years during her lengthy stays and through the Ronald McDonald Learning Program. The family also took a week-long escape and stayed at our Ocean Grove family retreat.

"We had the whole house to ourselves, and I remember exploring the township and having fun at the beach. It just felt like a beautiful getaway from the hospital and the stress," said Hanna.



Now 21, Hanna is cancer-free and excited for what's next, having recently graduated from her course.

*"In my course, I had to write a nonfiction piece, and mine was about neurodiverse advocacy. So now I'm going to get some work and life experience, and then do some further study in neurodiversity.*

*I wouldn't have had that realisation that neurodiversity studies is a field I want to get into if it hadn't been in my studies. If it wasn't for Ronald McDonald House, I wouldn't have studied it!*

*My family and I are extremely grateful for the support through my cancer journey and now into my adult life with this life changing scholarship," said Hanna.*

# A day in the life...

## volunteer Louise Gillie

FOR ALMOST 10 YEARS, LOUISE HAS SELFLESSLY DONATED HER TIME AND ENERGY TO ENSURE FAMILIES HAVE THE SUPPORT THEY NEED.



Louise is one of the 251 volunteers who form the heartbeat of the House. It is this dedication and generosity that helps create the welcoming, safe and supportive environment our families need.

As one of our overnight supervisors at Ronald McDonald House Hobart, Louise shares her experience on shift, and what keeps her coming back.

*"I've always loved the House.*

*I originally wanted to be involved because when I was a young mum, my two-year-old had a week stay in paediatrics. At that time, all there was for comfort was a recliner and really nothing else. It's a week I've never forgotten.*

*This is why it was lovely when I heard about the House and what they provide.*

*In my volunteer role, I stay in the House overnight, so there's always someone there for families, available for whatever needs to be done, at any time.*

*I love it. I work full-time and have adult children now, and the House is very much a part of my life.*

*My shift starts at 7pm and goes for just over 12 hours. I stay once a month and share this role with other amazing volunteers.*

*When we arrive for a shift, we check in, say hello to everyone and do a handover with the afternoon volunteer. We run through all the jobs on the list, then I'll get started on them.*

*Sometimes I see and welcome new families, other times they're the same warm faces still requiring the support of the House.*





*For me, one thing I really enjoy, is getting to know the families... it's so special when they interact and begin to trust you. I have particularly fond memories of one family who had a four-month stay in the House. It's special to know that I was able to be a small part of their story.*

*Just recently, my family had an experience that brought me even closer to the House. My granddaughter, who's now five months old, required the assistance of the paediatric ward for a week, when she was just 10 days old. A 10-day-old baby – my granddaughter – having a lumbar puncture and blood tests is not fun.*

*By the bedside was a care package with a note from Ronald McDonald House Charities Victoria & Tasmania, to help see them through until the next service came around. To me, it was just beautiful to see that coming back to what I had experienced*

*myself, it was like it was coming full circle. To have my son send me a photo of the little care package, it was really lovely and gave him an insight into what we do.*

*The best thing about it all for me is giving back... being able to help all the families who wouldn't have that support otherwise."*



# A sense of community far from home

*'IF IT WASN'T FOR RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE,  
WE WOULD'VE LOST OUR HOME.'*

After Isabel's routine 20-week scan, their life took a dramatic turn. She was stunned to discover that the baby boy she was carrying had a serious heart defect.

To help with the condition, immediately after birth, baby Ernesto required life-saving surgery in Melbourne to ensure he was able to breathe and circulate oxygen through his tiny body.

The news was devastating and overwhelming for Mum, Dad and big brother Quinterro. Hailing from northern NT and without friends or family down south, it seemed a surreal proposition. They had nowhere to stay, nor could they run two households.

Thankfully, they were referred to Ronald McDonald House North Fitzroy at Casa Elda Vaccari. They had the security and comfort of knowing they had a place to call home for the duration of Ernesto's treatment, no matter how long it took.

*"If it wasn't for Ronald McDonald House, we would've lost our home. We would have had to sell everything, move to Melbourne and find work straight away. It would have been absolutely chaotic."*

*Just one of the many great things about the House is being around others who understand first-hand what you're going through. The families, staff, and volunteers all became our support network, and we still keep in touch.*

*I take my hat off to them and can't thank them enough – they've done so much for us. I don't think they realise just how much they help. Their work*



*isn't easy, but they can make you feel like it's going to be okay. Everyone helps everyone, and they create a wonderful sense of community."*

Isabel and her family have been able to return home to the NT after their 246-night stay at Ronald McDonald House North Fitzroy at Casa Elda Vaccari. Ernesto is recovering well but will still need further treatment down the track.

While the prospect of further treatment is scary, it's reassuring that the family knows they can return to their home-away-from-home, whenever they need.



# We're off and racing with the Victoria Racing Club

WE WERE HONoured TO PARTNER WITH THE VICTORIA RACING CLUB (VRC) TO BE THE PIN & WIN CHARITY PARTNER FOR THE 2024 LEXUS MELBOURNE CUP CARNIVAL.

Funds raised through the sale of souvenir pins helped to support the essential services required by the families of seriously sick and injured kids.

This new and exciting partnership saw a record-breaking and life-changing result. Thanks to the incredible generosity of the VRC community, we've surpassed all previous records for funds raised. This milestone is a testament to the power of collaboration with the community and the impact we can make together.

Thank you to the wonderful ambassadors who spread the message of VRC Pin & Win's support of Ronald McDonald House Charities Victoria & Tasmania during the Spring Racing Carnival. Thank you James and Monica Cummings, Elly Wicks, Michelle Payne, Olivia Molly Rogers, Brodie Young, Brad Johnson, and Ross Stevenson.

We are beyond grateful for the support and look forward to continuing this remarkable partnership over the next year to create even greater change.

Money raised: **\$568,905**

Number of Race Meets: **18**

Number of pins sold: **56,403**



Ambassadors Elly Wicks and Michelle Payne



# The impact a House can make

RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE IS MORE THAN JUST ACCOMMODATION. FOR THOUSANDS OF FAMILIES EVERY YEAR, IT'S A SAFE-HAVEN FILLED WITH COMMUNITY, SUPPORT, AND HOPE.

The journeys of every family who comes through our doors is unique, but they all have one thing in common – the bravery and desire to support their child and keep their family together.

Here are the stories of some of our families, who call our Houses their home across Victoria & Tasmania.

## Ronald McDonald House Parkville: Ava

Within 23 hours of little Ava's birth, she and her mother, Holly, were rushed from their home in New Town, Tasmania to The Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne. Ava needed immediate paediatric specialist care, testing, and treatment.

To be close to the hospital and to Ava, Holly and her husband, Oliver were quickly able to move into Ronald McDonald House Parkville.

The devastating diagnosis was a very rare kind of leukaemia, with their newborn requiring chemotherapy.

*"She was six weeks old. And they said, 'we're going to start chemo'. I can't even describe to you what that was like. The whole family was just devastated. Like, you're supposed to be supporting your child, and I couldn't stop crying."*  
– Oliver, Ava's Dad



Ava endured four rounds of intense chemotherapy – the first round being the worst.

Being at Ronald McDonald House Parkville meant Holly and Oliver could tag-team Ava's care for the extensive 211 nights they needed to stay there.

*"We cannot speak more highly of the team and facilities at Ronald McDonald House Parkville. The services they offer, from free shuttles, volunteer groups cooking dinner, taking care of our mail, presents at Christmas and the feeling that nothing was too hard for them has made our life so much easier during this difficult time," said Oliver.*

## Ronald McDonald House Monash: Rykar-Mae

Baby Rykar-Mae was born prematurely via emergency c-section and suffered some complications at birth.

Her parents Gina and Jamie needed to be close by to her care. The new parents stayed at Ronald McDonald House North Fitzroy at Casa Elda Vaccari initially before moving to Ronald McDonald House Monash, when Rykar-Mae changed hospitals.

The severity of Rykar-Mae's medical conditions meant that parents Gina and Jamie always appreciated the roof over their heads. More importantly, they appreciated the support through the bad and tough days.



The support of the community of families within the House made a significant difference to their otherwise heart-wrenching journey, for a total of 304 nights.

*"If not for Ronald McDonald House, we would not have been able to maintain the closeness of a new bond with our baby. You have amazing support all around you, ready to hear your story, about your day or your thoughts. A shoulder to cry on, an ear to listen or a hand to reach to when you feel like you are trying to hold on and grasp a grip of life." – Gina, Ryker-Mae's Mum*

## Ronald McDonald House Hobart: Sharlette



At just five years old, Sharlette was diagnosed with a brain tumour.

Following eight-months of treatment in Melbourne, Sharlette and her family gained special permission to receive chemotherapy for medulloblastoma back in their home of Tasmania. This was ground-breaking, as Tasmanian medical staff were new to the kind of treatments Sharlette required.

The family returned to Tasmania and stayed at Ronald McDonald House Hobart for 164 nights.

*"We don't know what we would've done without the support of the Ronald McDonald House Hobart and are so thankful for the care and support that was provided during our stay." – Cassandra, Sharlette's Mum*

Sharlette is thankfully now in remission, but her family knows they can rely on the support of the House during her check-ups in the future.



## Ronald McDonald House North Fitzroy at Casa Elda Vaccari: Malik

Thanks to the support of the Children First Foundation, Malik and his mother, Sonia, were flown to Melbourne from their home in Timor-Leste for treatment. Malik had never been able to walk on his left leg due to degenerative growth plates in the knee.

Once in Melbourne, treatment included three separate surgeries and a full leg-brace over the course of almost nine months. During this time Malik and Sonia became a reliable source of joy for everyone at Ronald McDonald House North Fitzroy at Casa Elda Vaccari.

*"Having a well-established accommodation provider with a proven track record of excellence, child-safety and care is critical to us as we look to new and better ways of doing things to support more children from developing countries to access essential surgical care when they need it most." – Jessica Redwood, Children First Foundation CEO*

Despite their own experiences, Malik and Sonia became a source of smile, love, and laughter for other families in the House.

### Average House occupancy 2024

Parkville	76%
North Fitzroy	86%
Monash	85%
Hobart	78%

**80%**

# Room for the family

## Family Room visits:

Wodonga Hospital **1,133**

Monash Hospital **3,461**

Joan Kirner  
Women's & Children's  
Hospital Sunshine\* **320**

**TOTAL 4,914**

\*Estimates only, data incomplete

Run by our friendly volunteers onsite within the hospital, Ronald McDonald Family Rooms are welcoming spaces where families can take time out from the clinical environment of the wards, have a tea or coffee, freshen up with a shower or find a quiet space for a much-needed nap.

Free of charge and open to all families whose children are undergoing inpatient or outpatient treatment, our Family Rooms help make sure families have a home-away-from-home inside the Hospital but away from the clinical environment of the ward. Siblings of patients can also take some time out and have a bit of fun with toys in the play areas.

Some families we only see once or twice, and others return daily, sometimes for months at a time. Here are three families we got to know quite well while their children were receiving paediatric treatment on the ward.



## Monash Family Room

Sheenu's twin daughters, Bhuvi and Bhuvu were born at Monash Hospital in Clayton early 2024.

Arriving into the world dangerously premature, they spent an unusually long time in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), followed by a stay in the special care nursery, before they could be together at home as a family.

Four weeks after their homecoming, the family was launched back into turmoil as the twins were readmitted to hospital. The tiny duo were both diagnosed with Interstitial Lung Disease, a condition that interferes with the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide, causing fluid to collect in the lungs. Treatment is a long process, with months and months spent in hospital.

After spending their days on the ward beside the twins, one day when taking a much-needed wander, the twins' father discovered the Ronald McDonald Family Room, just around the corner. With the twins staying in hospital for close to five months, the new parents quickly became regular visitors to the Family Room when they needed a little time away.

As Sheenu says, "it's somewhere to have some alone time, have a peaceful cup of tea or coffee, have a snack to munch on and get the laundry done at any time. It all really makes a big difference.

*"The volunteers are just amazing. They make you feel that you're at home, as much as that is possible. It might be one of their lovely smiles or a kind gesture, even just the small ones, make a huge difference."*

Five months on, the twins are still receiving treatment in hospital.

*"The Family Room may not seem like a huge deal, but when you're facing often the worst time of your life, the little things go a very long way."*



## Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital Family Room

In September we were ecstatic to have the Family Room at Joan Kirner Women's and Children's at Sunshine Hospital open once again.



Following a few COVID-affected years, it was wonderful to celebrate the re-opening with staff, volunteers and teams from Western Health and Western Health Foundation, as well as some families from the children's ward.

With comfortable couches, space to work, games and books for children, plus complementary refreshments, it's a pocket sanctuary on the ward. And our lovely staff and volunteers are always happy to offer a chat and a cuppa when it's most needed!

A big thank you to the dedicated staff and volunteers for their hard work in getting the space ready for families. A special thanks must go to Western Health and Western Health Foundation for continued support.

Together, we can now service more families in need of respite during tough times.



## Wodonga Family Room

Iris and Sterling are newborn twins from the local area who became part of the Wodonga Family Room family this year while Iris required neonatal care. So the family stayed with us while she built enough strength to be able to go home.

While the family live close by, the Family Room was a much needed option as an alternative to leaving Sterling at home to drive to the hospital to feed Iris every 3 hours through the night.

The volunteers just adored their time with Sterling in the Family Room and took every opportunity for a cuddle.



### Did you know...

- Twins are 2-3 times more likely to need the Special Care Nursery or NICU than a single newborn.
- Twin births are 2-3 times more likely to require a caesarean, which means that mum can't drive for six weeks post-birth.
- The Ronald McDonald Family Room Wodonga is able to provide a home for the family and newborn, and be only a minute away from the twin who is still in hospital.

# A day in the life...

## a Family Room Program Coordinator – Steph Jones



Stephanie is one of our dedicated Family Room Program Coordinators based in Melbourne. She works across Ronald McDonald Monash House and Ronald McDonald Family Room within the Monash Children's Hospital, ensuring families have the support they need.

Stephanie reflected on why she is so passionate about her role, and how she best assists families during their journey with Ronald McDonald House Charities Victoria & Tasmania.

*"One thing that initially attracted me to the role was being able to work with families, children, and volunteers."*

*I work closely with our volunteers to support our families – recruiting, training, rostering, supporting them. They are amazing, and I think they're the backbone of the work that we do.*

*If I tried to describe a typical day, it would involve checking in at the House before heading up to the Family Room. I greet and check-in with families, volunteers and hospital staff, as well as coordinating their supports and various activities for the day and week.*

*You get to know everyone really well. Families are often there at the absolute worst time of their lives, and it's a privilege to help support them through this time.*

*My day also involves ensuring there are plenty of supplies in the Family Room. There are snacks, drinks and frozen meals cooked through our Meals from the Heart program. There are all sorts of bits and pieces that need to be done.*

*Every Monday, we deliver our weekly roster to the wards, and we see who can attend a learning or activity session – you're always guided by the clerks and nurses to ensure we are best supporting family needs.*





*Two days a week, we run our Early Years Program sessions with the wonderful Miss Amanda. When we ask the kids if they'd like to join in, there's usually lots of nodding heads as they really want to give it a go. It's a change of scenery for them and new things to do and learn.*

*A memorable Early Years Program session included a t-shirt design activity. Seventeen super excited kids joined in, drawing their very own designs that were put on t-shirts for them to keep – you can imagine how excited they were to put them on!*

*This year, I had the pleasure of meeting a lovely family with a young boy receiving cancer treatment. He started coming to Miss Amanda's lessons – he absolutely loved the sessions and always had a huge smile on his face – he raved about the whole experience!*

*His mother also raved about it, telling me he'd learnt all sorts of new things – and he had so much fun that he didn't even know he was learning. He'd been showing off the activities to all his friends and family. The family even wanted to ask the hospital to change his treatment days to align with the Early Years Program. His mother mentioned, it really helped him to get to the hospital because he enjoyed the sessions so much.*

*The parents are always so grateful as their kids are not only learning, but they're also doing something that's normal for most kids. The parents love just sitting there and watching their kid be happy. And that, for me, is so incredibly rewarding."*

# Hugo's journey,

## a family's story of hope and resilience

IT WAS A ROUTINE DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENT THAT WOULD TURN HUGO AND HIS FAMILY'S LIFE UPSIDE DOWN. AFTER AN URGENT REFERRAL AND NUMEROUS TESTS, THE PAEDIATRICIAN DELIVERED THE DEVASTATING NEWS: HUGO HAD LEUKAEMIA.



The family was immediately transferred to The Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne to begin his treatment. Sadly, Hugo's condition worsened, requiring two weeks in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

For Pene and Kristian, Hugo's parents, those first weeks were a blur of medical procedures, sleepless nights, and overwhelming emotions.

During this incredibly stressful time, they moved into Ronald McDonald House Parkville, so they could be close to the hospital. This meant they could spend their time by Hugo's side, instead of commuting a minimum of three hours each way back home to Port Campbell.

The House quickly became the family's home-away-from-home.

After Hugo's condition had stabilised, Pene recalls wheeling him into the House for the first time.

*"It was actually really exciting bringing him here. There were toys, an outdoor play area... that big open area in the living space. And we'd already started to build a rapport with staff by that time."*

For Hugo, who had been confined to a hospital room for weeks, the House offered a new world of experiences - he could play with other children and begin to regain his strength.





Through Hugo's intense treatment journey, he endured more than 20 general anaesthetics, with the family navigating the complexities of central lines and ports. While he struggled with this, his parents had the emotional toll of seeing their child go through such invasive procedures.

Thankfully, they were able to rely on the community of the House to help them on the tough days.

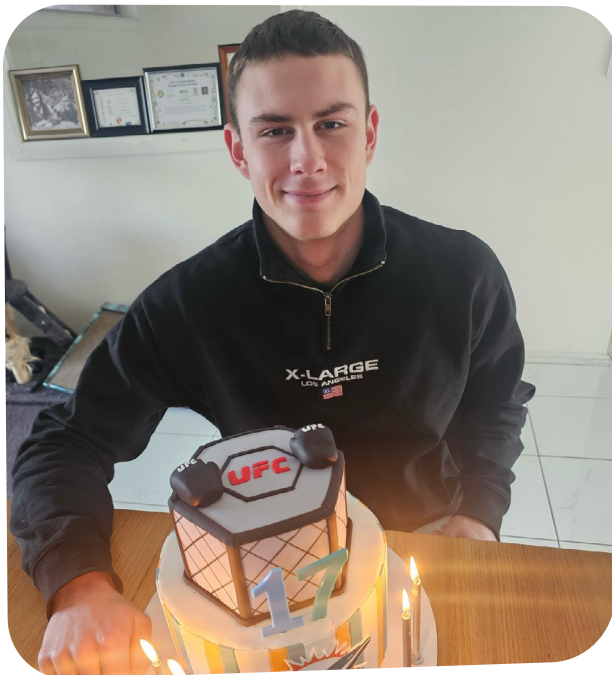
Three years since Hugo's diagnosis, Ronald McDonald House has continued to be a constant source of support, providing not just a place to stay, but a strong community of families on similar journeys. Among many things, Pene fondly remembers making pizzas in the kitchen with other families, and the bonds Hugo formed with other children staying at the House.

Hugo has just turned four and still requires ongoing treatments, although the frequency has decreased. For Hugo thankfully, the House has become a positive association with his trips to Melbourne.

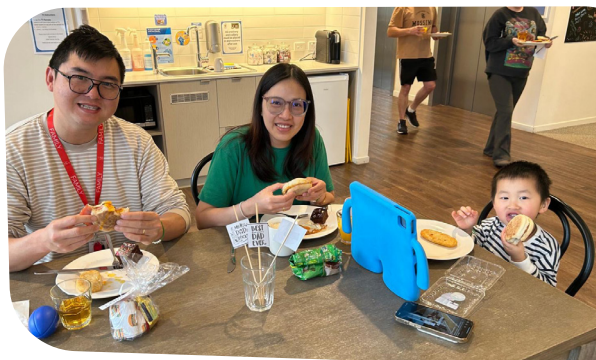
*"For him, this is the bonus of coming back to Melbourne for his treatment, Pene says. 'Being able to stay here for him is like, 'Yes, I'll do that'.'"*



# A year in pictures









# Paying-it-forward

## A special kind of community support

The bonds that develop between families of Ronald McDonald House is something truly special. Neighbours become like family, with a foundation of shared experiences and understanding.

We are continually amazed when these bonds turn into a desire to pay-it-forward to support other families in similar situations. Despite their own circumstances, RMHC families often dedicate their time and energy to ensuring other families can rely on Ronald McDonald House when they need it.

We are so grateful to all RMHC families for letting us be part of their journey – and particularly thankful to those who work tirelessly to raise awareness and funds for the House.

Here are some of the incredible stories of families who have chosen to give back to the House.



## Shearing is caring



After a routine scan at their home clinic in Wannon, Victoria, Tara's pregnancy was deemed high risk. For Tara and husband Ken, this meant they needed to quickly relocate to Melbourne for ongoing monitoring and their baby's birth.

The soon-to-be-parents were hours from home and without their support network. Thankfully, they were able to find sanctuary at Ronald McDonald House North Fitzroy at Casa Elda Vaccari.

Baby Cruz was born prematurely and required significant neonatal care – a scary time for any new parents. In the safe hands of some of the country's top specialists, the family were able to go home after just a few weeks.

*"We were exhausted after our first day with the little man in hospital... and we felt so welcomed when we arrived. We want other families to have that same support and feeling of relief."* – Tara

Once things had settled back home, Tara and Ken's minds turned back to their 19 day stay at Ronald McDonald House.

As a family of shearers, it made sense to Ken and Tara to run a sheep shearing event to raise funds to support other families who need the support of Ronald McDonald House - and Shear Cos We Care was born.

The event coincided with a sweltering day and after a 5am start, more than 1,700 sheep were shorn in 11 hours! The event raised more than



\$35,000 for other families like theirs who need support while their child undergoes treatment.

We are so grateful to Tara, Ken and the entire Shear Cos We Care community. Thank you for showing such dedication, passion, and care to support other families who need somewhere to turn when their child is seriously ill or injured.

## Team Jack making their mark

Born with Crouzon Syndrome, little Jack had 20 major operations before he turned four.

To ensure that Jack had access to the best treatment, the entire family of five relocated to Ronald McDonald House Parkville to be close to the hospital. The family called the House their home for 420 nights.

Jack's parents, Donna and Blair knew they wanted to find a way to give back to the families of the House. Once they had returned home, they promised to drop in and fill the communal pantry.

Their amazing support began with a food drive, reaching out to their networks for donations of everyday items that would help make things a little easier for families staying at the House. This first event resulted in the delivery of a trailer-full of food to the House!



Donna and Blair didn't stop there.

The family set a new goal to sponsor a room in Ronald McDonald House Parkville. Fun runs, walks, shopping trips and chocolate drives followed, and then the first trivia night seven years ago, raised \$8,000!

Team Jack now sponsors three rooms in our Houses and is committed to paying-it-forward and ensuring families like theirs can rely on the

support of Ronald McDonald House.

The Team Jack and greater Drysdale community has raised over \$120,000 since they started. Their passion and commitment to supporting others is truly inspiring. We are so grateful to have their support.

## Honouring Beth

In November 2021, Jess and James tragically lost their youngest daughter, Beth, to a rare and aggressive form of cancer. Sadly, from diagnosis to her passing was less than three weeks. She was only eight months old.

The family stayed at Ronald McDonald House Parkville during Beth's journey, enabling them all to be together during their difficult time.

Despite their immense grief, Jess and James selflessly wanted to show their support for the House and ensure other families had access to the essential services it provides. They set a goal to sponsor a room in Beth's honour.

Throughout March, Beth's birth month, family members fundraised as they rode their bikes 262km each to celebrate Beth's life – one km for each of the 262 days she was with them.

It was a family and community effort, with Beth's big sister, Millie riding 26.2kms herself.

Their efforts far surpassed their fundraising target, and there are now two rooms now in Beth's name. The kindness and selflessness of the entire community has helped to provide some relief for other families who are sadly navigating similar experiences.

Thanks to the generosity of Jess, James and their community, we are honoured to be able to support other families in Beth's name.



# We're having a ball!

RAISING VITAL FUNDS THROUGH A NIGHT OF STAR-STUDDED GLAMOUR.

## Annual Tasmania Gala Ball

In Hobart, the 2024 annual Tasmanian Gala Ball was once again a star-studded evening filled with joy and generosity.

The event sparked with engaging auctions and raffles, offering a colourful array of ways to support families. Hosted by Darren Sangwell, who has personally experienced the life-changing support of Ronald McDonald House, the evening was again guided with his expert flair.

The entertainment was nothing short of extraordinary, with The Voices Supergroup comprising of Jason Singh (Taxiride), Dale Ryder (Boom Crash Opera), Tania Doko (Bachelor Girl), and Dave Gleeson (The Screaming Jets), whose performance had the crowd singing and dancing the night away. And of course, no Tassie Ball would be complete without the vibrant 80s tribute band, Stand & Deliver.

Among the glitz and glam, nine-year-old Sharlette was the brightest star of the evening. While Sharlette underwent treatment for brain cancer, her mother Cassie spent 127 nights at the Ronald McDonald House in Hobart. Cassie shared their touching experience from the House and how they continue to find solace in the Ronald McDonald House Charities community during follow-up visits.

The willingness of Sharlette and Cassie in sharing their story was incredibly moving and was felt by everyone in the room.

An unforgettable moment of the night was Sharlette's moving performance of Let it Go from Frozen which she sang with the lead singer of Stand & Deliver.

The Gala Ball raised an incredible \$175,000 which is a testament to the entire Tasmanian community and their generosity. These funds have already started to make an unbelievable impact on families like Sharlette and Cassie's who need the support of the House.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to making the night a shining success including 7 Tasmania/ Hit 100.9, Hotel Grand Chancellor Hobart, The Nicholas Group, Bega Dairy & Drinks, JBM Group, Mingari + Co, Simplot Australia, Tasmanian Eye Institute, TCM Pty Ltd, William Adams CAT.



Lucas Whitelegg engaging supporters at the Victoria Gala Ball

## Annual Victorian Gala Ball

It was a year of milestones for the 2024 annual Victorian Gala Ball, which celebrated 32 years of raising funds for families of sick kids.

Close to 800 guests danced the night away, all united in their support of families who rely on the support of Ronald McDonald House Charities Victoria & Tasmania.



This year the event was hosted by Rebecca Maddern and guests were entertained by Paulini and Furnace and the Fundamentals.

But the real highlight came from Bree and her 11-year-old son Lucas.

There wasn't a dry eye in the room when Bree and Lucas, delivered their heartfelt speeches about their journey throughout Lucas's life and the part that Ronald McDonald House has played in their story.

Bree shared her experience of warmth and welcome on arrival at Ronald McDonald House Monash after a truly traumatic day.

They moved everyone in the room and inspired so much generosity.

Together, the Victorian community raised a record-breaking \$731,000, bringing the total fundraising over the last 32 years to a life-changing \$10 million.

The funds raised will contribute to providing vital accommodation, care, and support to families in need. Special thanks to all who supported the event including the Gala Ball Committee, our wonderful volunteers, Zagame Automotive Group, Crown, Encore, Essential Caravans, Barry & Helen Fitzgerald, Nine Entertainment, oOh!media, QMS, Seven Network Limited.

## Celebrating generosity

Danny Wallis has been an incredible advocate and supporter of Ronald McDonald House Charities Victoria & Tasmania since 2012.

His unbelievable generosity started when he generously gifted his newly purchased three-bedroom home in South Melbourne to RMHC VIC & TAS. Danny purchased the fully-furnished home through the well-known TV show, The Block and gifted it for a period of three-years to provide a home-away-from-home for families of sick kids.

Since this high profile start to the partnership with RMHC VIC & TAS, Danny's generosity has only continued and his support of families is unwavering.

He took this support to new heights this year, when during the Victorian Gala Ball pledge event – where guests are encouraged to pledge a night of support at the House for families – Danny made an unbelievable pledge. Danny, through the Danny Wallis Philanthropic Foundation, was donating \$58,400 a full 365 nights.

From that point on, the generosity in the room flourished – guest after guest joined in the giving spirit. More than simply the financial contribution, Danny's support encourages others to get involved.

When asked what inspires Danny to continue to support RMHC VIC & TAS, the response was touching. *"It's the idea of providing free accommodation for families that is close to their children's care and making sure the family can stay together, keeping them whole as a family in hard times. What they're going through is hard enough. If they find themselves separated it makes it even worse."*

Words can't describe how grateful we are for Danny and his support. He has and continues to make an immeasurable difference to the lives of families with sick kids. We are so grateful for his support.



Danny Wallis pictured with Barry Fitzgerald celebrating 30 years as Gala Ball Committee Chair and Peter Mitchell, Director and responsible person of the Danny Wallis Foundation.

# When our community fills our hearts

AS A COMMUNITY-FUNDED ORGANISATION, WE RELY ON THE GENEROSITY OF THOSE AROUND US TO ADVOCATE AND RAISE FUNDS TO SUPPORT FAMILIES IN NEED.

Lucky for us, the Ronald McDonald House Charities Victoria & Tasmania community is like no other. We are surrounded by dedicated groups and individuals who rise to the occasion to support our RMHC led campaigns.

Funds raised through our events ensure that families continue to experience comfort, support, and hope when they need it most. We're grateful to every person who participates, donates or spreads the word – your support is life-changing.

Have a look at some events our incredible community supported this year.

## Dancing up a storm

Dance for Sick Kids is a fun, seven-day dance challenge for people of all skills and abilities.



Held during National Families Week, participants get a'movin' and a'groovin' to raise funds to support seriously ill and injured children.



This joyful challenge saw us collaborating with our colleagues at Ronald McDonald House Charities Greater Western Sydney, to ensure the biggest impact for families.

Collectively, 3,472 keen dancers sign up for the dance week and committed to raising funds. The week was filled with delightfully fun videos of kids, crews, and colleagues dancing their hearts out and showing their support.

This powerful group of dancers raised an impressive \$664,179! Funds are shared between our two Chapters, expanding our reach and support of more families of sick kids.





Justin Amor and family, who stayed at Parkville House 30 years ago.

## We're in a spin!

The 2024 Ride for Sick Kids Spin Challenge was our most successful yet.

Thirty-nine teams (including a couple of legendary individuals) kept the wheels turning for an incredible 10 hours. Together, they cycled a total of 9,378kms and raised more than \$160,000!

This means 1,000 nights of support and accommodation for families staying at a Ronald McDonald House in Victoria and Tasmania.

Thank you to our amazing event supporters McDonald's Australia, Swisse Wellness Australia and LVL Up for keeping us fuelled and hydrated.

Congratulations to our winners on the day:

- Highest Individual Fundraiser – Louise Amor
- Highest Team Fundraiser – Coles Property 1
- Most Kilometres – Republica with 356kms
- Our Best Dressed – Strenson Group.

We are so grateful for the entire Ride for Sick Kids community, including sponsors, riders and donors. It was a day full of fun, joy and making an incredible impact.



## Leading steps

Our annual CEO Walk in My Shoes event is an immersive experience for Board members, CEOs and Senior Managers. The challenge sees them take on the experience of a day in the life of a family staying at Ronald McDonald House.

In July, eleven senior business leaders in Tasmania banded together and raised over \$16,000 in support of families with seriously ill or injured children.



The group toured the House, met with families, provided meals, responded to midnight hospital emergencies and workshopped solutions to business challenges faced by Ronald McDonald House Charities Victoria & Tasmania.

It's incredible how quickly the leaders formed a deep bond while having a first-hand insight of what many families face each day.

The group were so inspired by their experience, they committed to visit the House again to cook meals for families to access after a long day on

the ward. They have become lifelong advocates for the work of Ronald McDonald House Charities Victoria & Tasmania. We are so honoured to have such committed supporters.

*"In just 24 hours, I experienced a whirlwind of emotions — laughter, tears, and even a midnight delivery of an Eeyore toy to the Royal Hobart Hospital."*

*This unexpected journey with RMHC VIC & TAS gave me a firsthand glimpse into the daily struggles that families face when dealing with a child's serious illness.*

*What struck me most was how quickly connections were formed as we all came together for a cause that truly matters. I'm incredibly grateful for the support from friends, family, and colleagues who donated. This experience was raw, real, and a reminder of the power of community in moments that matter most."*

*– Ally Bradley, Executive General Manager TAS, VIC, SA & NT, Southern Cross Austereo*







## 20 years to a tee

In October, we held our 20th annual Victorian Golf Day at the spectacular National Golf Course at Cape Schanck. The weather held out and made for a perfect day on the course for our 37 Hole Sponsors!

Fun and fundraising were had on and off the golf course for our 240 keen attendees. Our golfers spent the evening enjoying dinner, raising vital funds through an auction, pledging to support nights of accommodation for families, laughing alongside comedian Dave Thornton and were

even surprised by the singing waiters!

The best part of the day was raising an incredible \$117,410 to ensure families have access to the essential services provided by Ronald McDonald House Charities Victoria & Tasmania.

The successful day and fundraising result were only possible thanks to those who joined us. Thank you to our Principal Sponsor, Stillwell Motor Group, the players, guests, and volunteers who went above and beyond to achieve such a life-changing result for families of sick and injured kids.

# Thank you to our incredible Partners

It takes a village to keep our Houses, Family Rooms and programs running. This is why we are so grateful to our committed Partners for their tireless efforts and contributions throughout the year.

Our Partners all play a key role in ensuring families have access to the best possible care while their child is undergoing treatment. None of our work is possible without their ongoing support.

On behalf of the thousands of families you help, thank you.

## Mission Partner

McDonald's is Ronald McDonald House Charities' founding and Mission Partner. We are more than thankful for their generosity and ongoing support over the past 44 years. McDonald's Corporate, Licensees, and their customers continue to show their commitment to helping even more families of seriously ill children across Australia.

Thank you to the entire McDonald's system for their unwavering support. You help to change lives every day.

## Hospital Partnerships

Working together with our Hospital Partners is vital in delivering our mission to provide family centred care. We are committed to extending our hospital outreach, creating clear and open communication and building long term relationships to deliver the highest quality standards of family care.

We are so grateful to our Hospital Partnerships and networks, who include:

- Albury Wodonga Health
- Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital, Western Health Sunshine
- Mercy Health for Women and Children
- Monash Children's Hospital
- Royal Hobart Hospital
- Sunshine Hospital
- The Royal Children's Hospital
- The Royal Women's Hospital
- Western Health

Together, we know that we can continue to put the health and wellbeing of families first.

## Community Partners

It's heart-warming to see the outpouring of support from our Community Partners each year. From holding events and donation drives, to being some of our biggest advocates – the support never ceases to amaze us.

Thank you to every group who has dedicated their time and energy to showing their support for Ronald McDonald House Charities Victoria & Tasmania. We'd like to acknowledge some specific groups including Sandra and her gift-wrapping service, It's the Little Things, Freemasons Foundation Gregorios Lodge, Grow to Be., The Rotary Club of Carlton and schools Melbourne Grammar and Wesley College.

Thank you for your passionate support.



## Corporate Partners

We'd be lost without the support of our Corporate Partners. Their ongoing support throughout the year ensures that families have somewhere they can turn.

The support comes in a multitude of ways, including being matching partners and inspiring the community to support, joining group volunteering opportunities and providing home-cooked meals for our families and gifting mission-critical funding.

Whatever the need, our Corporate Partners are always there to provide. We are incredibly thankful for their support and look forward to continuing these partnerships in the years to come.

A special thanks to Northern Trust, Canaccord Genuity, Don Smallgoods, Nicepak, Tassal, Sports Entertainment Network and Aurora Energy.

### Aurora Energy

Aurora Energy supports programs and initiatives that prioritise vulnerable Tasmanians and connection within community.

Their partnership with RMHC VIC & TAS has provided hundreds of delicious meals through Group Volunteering and inspiration for countless public donations as a matching partner for our Christmas Appeal.

Aurora Energy had previously supported us in smaller ways, then came on board as a Platinum Partner for the 2023 Matched Giving Day Campaign, and have since sponsored a room within Hobart House.

As well as this invaluable financial support, CEO Nigel Clark is always happy to roll up his sleeves and get stuck in to whatever work is required as part of their Group Volunteering sessions. Nigel said the energy retailer was thrilled to support families going through terrible times.

*"We are a Tasmanian business who supports Tasmanians and we greatly value the practical and compassionate care that families receive at the Ronald McDonald House. No family deserves to have a sick child, but through our support we hope we can help to lighten the load, and we encourage everyone to get behind this worthy cause."*



# Group Volunteers

## lending a hand



Our families tell us that often it's the small things that make the House feel like their home. The services provided by our Group Volunteers are a huge part of creating this welcoming environment.

The support offered through Group Volunteering is like a giant hug for our families – coming back to a home-cooked meal after a long day on the hospital ward offers much-needed and much appreciated practical support.

Groups cook up a storm to provide families with home-cooked meals and baked goods. They also help with the ongoing tasks like, organising pantries, building donated furniture or tending to the garden – every bit helps.

With humble beginnings, the program unofficially started with a community's generosity of a casserole being dropped into the House. Since then, we're proud to say that the program has continued to grow and is now a core part of the success of the House.



**139**

Meals from the Heart



**26**

Freezer Food Cook-ups



**53**

Baking with Love



**20**

Working Bee



**238**

Group Volunteering session  
(156 corporate, 82 community)



**9520**

hours of volunteering  
through Group Volunteering  
workshops



# McHappy Day

## turns purple



McHappy Day means much more than just making sure you eat a Big Mac on Saturday 16 November!

As part of the campaign, a host of stars, including AFL players and Joel Creasey, were on hand to visit the Houses in the lead up to the big day. The real drawcard though, was our favourite purple, McHappy Day Ambassador, Grimace, who led the way in the 2024 festivities.

One of our brightest highlights was his visit to our Parkville House on the day prior, before making it over to The Royal Children's Hospital.

Popular Hit 100.9 duo, Dan and Christie, broadcast live from the House that morning, where they also gifted one of our beautiful families \$1,000 in an on-air challenge!

Dan and Christie were at the tail-end of an intensive two-week tour of Hobart and Victoria, where they visited Houses, families and McDonald's restaurants, discovering the importance of supporting RMHC and McHappy Day.

The families also loved the added excitement of all the McHappy Day action, bringing much fun and joy to their day!

Staff and volunteers visited their local McDonald's restaurants to thank them for their support, and quickly found themselves swept up in all the colour and energy of the enthusiastic crews!

Nationally, the day raised just over \$6 million, a phenomenal result! We can't offer enough thanks to McDonald's, our Founding and Mission Partner, for all the support they offer to the families who need our services.



# Gifts in Wills

WHEN PEOPLE WANT TO SUPPORT FAMILIES BUT CAN'T NECESSARILY ALLOCATE THE FUNDS IN THE CURRENT YEAR, MANY CONSIDER INCLUDING A LEGACY GIFT TO RMHC VIC & TAS IN THEIR WILL.

Read about Joan and Muriel, who wanted their life earnings and their incredible legacy gift to support rural families.

## Two inspirational trailblazers

On 4 February 2023, the world lost a remarkable woman when Joan Heard passed away at age 93.



Joan Heard and Muriel Morrish at Muriel's 90th birthday celebrations.

Years earlier, Joan and her late partner, Muriel Morrish, decided to leave behind a legacy that would truly make a difference to rural families.

Living on the outskirts of Bendigo, though childless themselves, they felt a deep connection to families with seriously ill children and their need for support. Moved by stories of how RMHC VIC & TAS keeps families together during challenging times, Joan and Muriel made the heartfelt decision to name the organisation as a significant beneficiary in their Will.

Their generous gift will support RMHC VIC & TAS's mission to help families when they need it most, a cause close to their hearts.

Joan and Muriel's own lives were filled with love, adventure and a pioneering spirit.

Firm friends since their early teens when they went to teachers college, the two girls from farming families understood the difficulties of leaving the farm for any length of time to get to hospital, let alone stay there extensively.

The primary school teachers turned cattle breeders after a chance meeting, and they became trailblazers in Australia's Murray Grey cattle industry, with national recognition and awards named in their honour.

Both Joan and Muriel were consistently active in supporting causes and fighting for change in their community and industries. They were enthusiastic philanthropists, and managed properties in the Bendigo area where people in need could stay at no charge when they needed.

Joan and Muriel's incredible story serves as an inspiring example of how individuals can make a profound difference through legacy giving, supporting the ever-changing needs of seriously ill children and their families for generations to come.



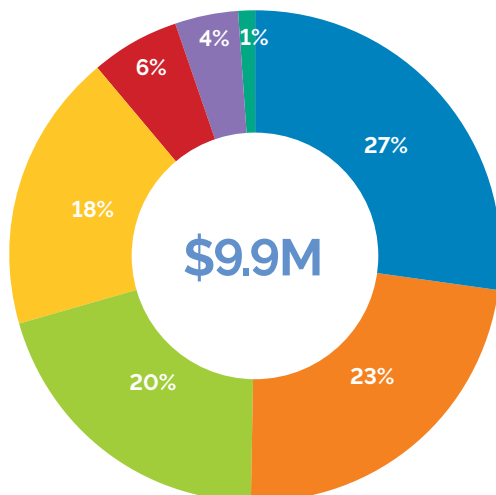
Joan Heard at her home in 2023.



# Strength in numbers

2024 MARKED ANOTHER YEAR OF GROWTH AND IMPACT, POWERED BY THE INCREDIBLE GENEROSITY OF OUR SUPPORTERS.

Through the combined efforts of individual donors, community groups, organisational partners, and our corporate supporters, we've not only maintained but strengthened our essential services for families in need. Our financial stewardship continues to prioritise creating a genuine home away from home that goes beyond accommodation to offer relief during challenging medical journeys.



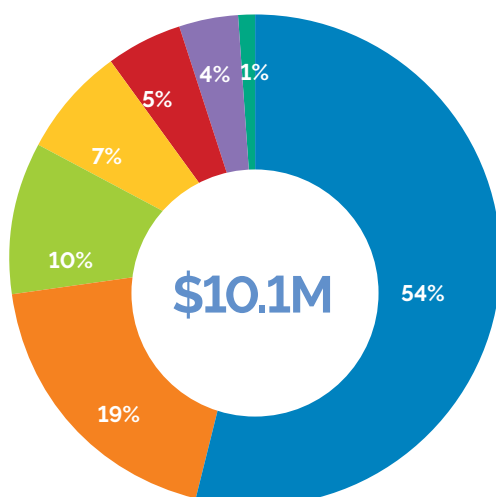
\*Eligible families (those living over 100km from treatment and interstate) can claim the Patient Accommodation Travel Scheme (PATS) subsidy from the government. We never charge families to stay with us—your support ensures our doors remain open regardless of a family's ability to access PATS.

## Income 2024

- Event Fundraising
- Patient Accommodation Travel Scheme\*
- RMHC Australia Mission Grant Funding
- Donations and Grants
- Bequests
- Investment income
- RMHC Global Grants

## McDonald's Partnership

As our Founding and Forever Partner, McDonald's provides approximately 30% of our income across income streams, through funding and grants (through RMHC Australia), supporting events, store fundraising, generous donations from licensees and staff, and of course, McHappy Day. Their extraordinary commitment spans from major fundraising events to grassroots store initiatives, making a transformative difference in our ability to serve families in need.



## Expenses 2024

- People
- Facility Expenses
- Events
- Depreciation Expense
- Fundraising Investment
- Learning Program
- Administrative Expenses

# With thanks to...

## Trusts and Foundations

Almax Family Trust  
Collier Charitable Fund, a donor of Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation  
Community Bank Pinewood  
CVGT Employment  
Freemasons Foundation Victoria  
Godolphin Australia Pty Ltd  
Grifols Australia  
Gringlas Family Charitable Fund  
Gualtiero Vaccari Foundation  
Nelson Alexander Charitable Foundation  
Northern Trust  
RMHC Australia  
RMHC Global  
Susan Blackley Trust  
TG & JM Matthews Foundation  
The Pierce Armstrong Foundation

## Estates

Estate of Maureen Carmel Ashford  
Estate of Valma Mary Cox  
Estate of Joan Heard & Muriel Morrish

## Confirmed Bequestors

Emily Beecroft  
Shane & Thisara Coster  
James Elliott  
Alisha Friend  
Elaine Fuller  
Gus Lambden  
Belinda Moss  
Aimee Phegan  
Tenielle Reid  
Geoff & Katina Sanger  
Denis Shaw  
Jan Slegers  
Jason Wall  
Ben Westover

## Major Donors

June Bramich  
Ellis & Denise Richardson  
Sauervein Family  
Danny Wallis

## Founding and Mission Partners

McDonald's





# Committed to best practice

We are so proud of our dedicated team.

Every person in the team has extensive experience in their respective fields, and everyone is incredibly passionate about working with Ronald McDonald House Charities Vic & Tas.

Their commitment is demonstrated every day, working tirelessly in support of sick children and their families.

## CEO

- Peter Bishop

## Board Directors

- Garry Thompson - Board Chair
- Sarah Connolly
- Alice Gilbertson
- Julia Hernan
- Adele McIntosh
- Patrick Moloughney
- Kelly Nardella
- Tony Pearse
- Claire Richards
- Danielle Smith
- David Upham
- David Zalunardo



## Staff

Our wonderful staff are centric to mission delivery at RMHC VIC & TAS. Their commitment, compassion and dedication to supporting seriously ill children and their families shines through their work each day.

RMHC VIC & TAS employs 76 staff across four Ronald McDonald Houses, three Ronald McDonald Family Rooms, and the Ronald McDonald Learning Program, as well as our corporate support team (Fundraising & Marketing, People & Culture, Finance).

Our teams are built on shared values and genuine drive to deliver the highest quality service and experience for all our stakeholders – we take pride in our relationships, collaboration and inclusion of all families, volunteers and supporters.

Full Time	<b>20</b>
Part Time	<b>32</b>
Casual	<b>24</b>



## Volunteers

We love our volunteers!

Our volunteers are a group of very special people – they are invaluable assets to our Houses, Family Rooms and events. They're actively involved in many roles, from housekeeping to administration, special events, transporting families, as well as cooking meals.

On behalf of the Board, staff, and most importantly, the families we help, we thank each and every one of you from the bottom of our collective heart, and we simply couldn't function without you.

No. volunteers	<b>251</b>	Wodonga Family Room	<b>1,597</b>
No. volunteer shifts	<b>4,677</b>	Monash Family Room	<b>2,574</b>
Total volunteer hours	<b>18,797</b>	Joan Kirner Women's and Children's at Sunshine Hospital Family Room	<b>49</b>
Parkville	<b>1,717</b>	Shuttle Bus Services	<b>1,540</b>
North Fitzroy	<b>3,632</b>	Events	<b>2,828</b>
Monash	<b>817</b>		
Hobart	<b>4,043</b>		



# The support that's still needed

There are so many ways you can get involved and show your support for the families who rely on Ronald McDonald House Charities Victoria & Tasmania.

From making a donation, organising your own fundraising event, sponsoring a room or donating your time – no matter how you choose to support, every bit helps to deliver support and programs to seriously ill children and their families.

## So, how can you help?



### One-off or regular donations

It's easy – through our website, in just a few clicks, your financial support can help keep families together in times of need.



### Gift in Will

Leave a legacy for future generations. Speak to a member of our team to hear how even a small percentage of your estate can make a huge difference to families doing it tough.



### Host or participate in a fundraising event

Fundraising can be fun, because you can make it whatever you want: tea party, fun run, head shave! Get started on our website today.



### Adopt a Room

More significant donations can cover costs associated with the upkeep of a room in one of the Houses. Your support helps ensure a room of support for a family.



### Group Volunteering

Bring your work team to one of the Houses to support families. Experience first-hand the positive impact that volunteering can have.



### Workplace Giving

Giving directly from your pre-tax salary is one of the best ways to give. Find out more on our website.

Families need your support now more than ever  
[rmhcvictas.org.au](https://rmhcvictas.org.au)

We would like to thank the thousands of individuals – from families, corporate partners, community organisations, clubs and companies – all who made generous contributions throughout 2024.

## Keeping families close™

### **Ronald McDonald House Hobart**

62 Collins Street, Hobart  
(03) 9966 8480

### **Ronald McDonald House Monash**

33 Kanooka Grove, Clayton  
(03) 9966 8460

### **Ronald McDonald House North Fitzroy at Casa Elda Vaccari**

863 Brunswick Street North, North Fitzroy  
(03) 9966 8440

### **Ronald McDonald House Parkville**

22 Gatehouse Street, Parkville  
(03) 9966 8400



**Ronald McDonald  
House Charities®**  
VIC & TAS

#KeepingFamiliesClose  
[rmhcvictas.org.au](https://rmhcvictas.org.au)

### **Ronald McDonald Family Room Monash**

Monash Children's Hospital  
(03) 8572 3726

### **Ronald McDonald Family Room**

**Joan Kirner Women's and Children's at  
Sunshine Hospital**  
Sunshine Hospital  
(03) 8345 0888

### **Ronald McDonald Family Room Wodonga**

Wodonga Hospital  
(03) 6024 5206

### **Ronald McDonald Learning Program**

863 Brunswick Street North, North Fitzroy  
(03) 9966 8440

### **RMHC VIC & TAS**

[victas@rmhc.org.au](mailto:victas@rmhc.org.au)  
863 Brunswick Street North, North Fitzroy  
(03) 9966 8420