

JLC Issue Corner: *This is the sixth in a series of articles touching on some of the social challenges in Calgary. We'd like to give you some food for thought by showing how our JLC Healthy and Active Living initiatives fit into the bigger picture.*

The Effects of a Child's Illness on Family And How the Ronald McDonald House Can Make a Difference

Submitted by Jodie Berezney

To coincide with our February DIAD at the Ronald McDonald House, this month's article will look at the effects of a child's illness on family members. In celebration of the JLC's 60th Anniversary it will take a historic look at the role the JLC played in supporting the opening of the RMH in 1985 and the importance of the RMH to many families with ill children.

To many of us with healthy children, it is hard to imagine what life would be like for us if our children were extremely ill. For those that need not imagine because their children are unfortunate enough to be stricken with illness, thankfully the Ronald McDonald House is there to help. Our role in supporting the opening of the RMH as well as our role in volunteering at the RMH has made a difference in our community and the lives of many families challenged with the unique pressures of life characterized by ill children.

Challenges

Families with ill children may experience psychological, financial, emotional and physical burdens due to their circumstances. As such families with ill children often benefit from relying on family and friends for help. They welcome offers for meals, assistance with errands; or carpools for siblings. In addition managing the financial strain associated with a child's illness (medical expenses, additional living fees, and cost of time off work) can be the most challenging.

Ronald McDonald House

RMH is a temporary residential facility that serves as a "home away from home" for sick children and their families. Almost 18,000 families have stayed at the RMH since 1985. At a minimal cost of \$12/night, families can try to keep their lives as normal as possible despite the medical crisis. It includes specialized programs and support for families who live outside a 45 km radius from the hospital. Families can access accommodations, share meals, rest from caring for sick child at hospital; and draw on strength of other RMH families.

JLC role

With support from the JLC, McDonalds, service clubs; foundations and individual donors, the RMH opened in March 1985. JLC organized a fundraising dinner and raised \$55,000. JLC also provided a Board Member and volunteers to support the RMH staff and board from 1984-1987. Volunteers set up the volunteer program and filled the position of Volunteer Coordinator and established and ran the volunteer Training program. JLC helped hire the House Manager and provided an administrative assistant while furnishing the playroom. On February 24, 2010, 8 JLC members volunteered for

the RMH Home for Dinner Program. JLC members donated toys, books and gift cards for the RMH Magic Room.

Assisting these families at their time of need is an extremely worthwhile cause. By providing the comforts of a home cooked meal and shelter in close proximity to their ill loved ones at minimal cost helps make an unimaginable situation more tolerable. The RMH is an excellent facility that the JLC has been supporting for 25 years

References/Resources Used:

Ronald McDonald of Southern Alberta website

<http://www.rmhsouthernalberta.org>

Junior League of Calgary website

www.juniorleaguecalgary.com/past-projects

“When the Child’s Illness is Life Threatening: Impact on the Parents” by Shira Katz

www.medscape.com/viewarticle/444200

“Illness in Children”

www.merck.com/mmhe/sec23/ch287/ch287c

“Caring for a Seriously Ill Child”

www.kidshealth.org/parent/system/ill/seriously_ill
