Ten-year-old Grace loves giving her baby dolls check-ups.

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"It is so empowering for Grace to have a voice in her treatment. This is a kid who a year ago wouldn't make eye contact with her doctors, refused to tell us how she was feeling, or told us she didn't want to talk about it. Now for her to say she may need a treatment - she's prepared to speak up. That empowerment and part of this change we have seen in Grace is not from treatment, it's from being here, in this House, with people who understand what she's going through." - Cortney, Grace's Mom
t has been a blessing to serve as Board Chair over the past two years. The House is a special place - not only a beautiful building, but a home where employees, volunteers, and other families care for our guests while they’re staying with us. I am humbled by how people embrace our mission and enthusiastically give their time and resources. Our organization has grown and evolved from when we first opened our doors to families thirty-five years ago, but our central purpose has remained the same: to keep families together and promote the health and well-being of children.

I am also incredibly excited for the future of the House: being able to serve more families at our House in Wauwatosa, bringing our hospitality to families with children being treated from all 50 states and 46 countries, and helping promote pediatric health in the city of Milwaukee. We are committed to expanding reach and being good stewards of your gifts.

WAYS YOU CAN HELP This Holiday Season

At RMHC Eastern Wisconsin, we make our House festive for our families whose homes are often far away.

Plan a toy drive to stock the Magic Room

Attend or organize a fundraiser to benefit RMHC

Donate online or at McDonald’s Restaurants

Include RMHC in your estate plans

Hold a food drive to stock our pantry

Apply to volunteer at the House

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A new treatment plan brought Grace to Milwaukee, but RMHC brought her so much more.

Grace has a few favorite things she’s always happy to talk about – including her love of dolls, her friends, and favorite books. When you see her big smile and hear her mom’s laugh, it’s difficult to even picture a kiddo that couldn’t get out of bed less than a year ago.

Grace was diagnosed with cyclic vomiting syndrome (CVS) at a very young age after weekly episodes of unrelenting vomiting. Episodes often lasted for up to three hours, with Grace vomiting every five minutes, unexplained by any other conditions. When Grace turned ten, her situation had truly escalated to a breaking point. She spent more time in bed than out, having bad days four or more days a week. A bad day often meant Grace could not even eat or take fluids. Looking at the extent of Grace’s decline, the opportunity to finally participate in a neurostimulator treatment program was an automatic yes.

The small neurostimulator device is attached behind Grace’s left ear. It sends an electrical impulse to acupuncture points, stimulating the vagus nerve. The vagus nerve controls the communication system between a person’s brain and body systems that are
regulated unconsciously, like blood pressure and heart rate. The plan was that Grace would get the device placed on Mondays, wear it for five days, get two days off, and start the cycle again for a number of weeks. It was supposed to be easy - minimal risk or side effect compared to the medications that Grace’s body had not been able to handle. When you ask Grace and Cortney to describe what it was like, they both give a little smile. “The first four weeks were brutal.”

But through the stress of the unknown, there were moments that shone brightly. At RMHC’s Family Dinner the first night of her first device placement, Grace noticed another little girl with a neurostimulator device behind her ear. They found each other again and were fast friends bonding over matching American Girl dolls from the Magic Room. Grace’s new friend was the same age and a few weeks ahead in treatment. This opportunity for the families to share experiences gave Grace and Cortney new hope in sticking out the treatment even longer than anticipated.

“It’s very isolating to have a child with a rare disease. There’s not a lot of understanding in the world of what life with a specific rare disease looks like. Everyone has hard things - this is just our hard thing. But to encounter someone else who can say, ‘My hard thing is the same as your hard thing, and we understand what these little pieces of life are like,’ -it’s irreplaceable.”

As the family went home twelve weeks later, Grace seemed like a whole new kiddo. Over the next months, she spent only three bad days in bed. Looking forward, Cortney is conscious that Grace has set the precedent for the neurostimulator treatment. She’s one of the youngest patients to try this treatment and there is no guidebook for what happens next. But for the first time in years, they are empowered and know they aren’t walking through the unknown alone.

“In the general public there is not space created for children with chronic illness, for children who need mobility aids. Those things are ignored most of the time or trampled over or questioned. But to be somewhere where it’s just the norm, no one questions, it’s just ok to be whoever you are. And to not only have those people who can say, ‘I understand your journey.’ It’s the people who say, ‘I don’t understand, but I want to walk with you for a little while.’”

-Cortney Heuer, Grace’s Mom
Gavin is 16-years-old with a mischievous smile, a sarcastic comment for every conversation, and an eye for pranks. Typical teenager, right?

But when Gavin was 14, he was diagnosed with a terminal brain tumor that is rarely found in children - 60 is the average diagnostic age for glioblastoma (GBM). For nearly two years, Gavin and his mom, Sara, have been traveling to Milwaukee every other week and staying at the Ronald McDonald House.

It is a very adult medical world that children like Gavin are forced into. Surgery, 33 rounds of radiation, and ongoing palliative IV chemotherapy are what the rest of life gets scheduled around. It would be easy to get stuck on the challenges, but Sara has made it clear that they do not feel sorry for themselves:

“I never expected the impact the House and families would have on us... we've gained friendships, we’ve gained support, we’ve grown and learned acceptance of other people's journeys - and our own. There are always people fighting battles.”

Whether they are gathering with others for board games and movie night or sharing what adventure Josh the Teddy Bear has been on since we saw them last, Gavin and Sara are determined to bring positivity. Nothing about their journey is “typical,” but they will always look for joy along the way.

What can YOU do to help?

At the top of Gavin’s RMHC Wishlist is toys (especially trucks and LEGO sets) and gift cards for the Magic Room. He said, "Kids can be scared coming here for the first time. The toy in the Magic Room is something to get their mind off what is happening, and gives them something to do while they’re here.”

Visit our website to view a complete Wishlist and learn more about the Magic Room.
What do the families say
ABOUT OUR HOUSE?

It was wonderful and a relaxing time together. It was incredibly helpful to not worry about shopping, prepping, and cooking dinner after long days at the hospital.

A huge thank you to all of the staff and the volunteers that make this House available to me. Without this place, I would not have the means to be here with my daughter! This place continues to be such a blessing.

This place is beyond any words to explain the beauty that has been given to our hearts and souls. Thank you all.

This House provides the best support for families with sick loved ones. The children’s play room, healthy air filtering plants, educational and homey touches, are all what make this a great place to be.

This place is such a homey atmosphere! It’s nice to have a place to play and just be together doing normal things like eating an easy meal or snack when so many things are not normal. Thank you!

It was such a relief to come here - to have a room and meal and many perks I was not expecting. This place took so much stress and the financial burden away from our stressful situation. Thank you!
3 Ways to Donate

♥ Go online - www.RMHC-EasternWI.org
♥ Call Bridget - she’d love to talk to you! (414) 935-6511
♥ Clip it - send the form below to:
   RMHC Eastern Wisconsin
   Attn: Jennifer Krueger
   8948 Watertown Plank Road,
   Milwaukee, WI 53226

Enclosed is my gift ☐ $500 ☐ $250 ☐ $100 ☐ Other: ______
Name: __________________________________________________________
Address: _________________________________________________________
Telephone: ____________________________________________________________________________
Email: _____________________________________________________________

By giving your email address you will receive occasional e-newsletters. We do not sell or share information.
CC Number: _____________________________ Security Code: ________
Name on Card: ___________________________ Exp. Date: _________
Signature: ________________________________
☐ Please send receipt via email. ☐ I’d like to cover the payment processing fee.

Please make checks payable to Ronald McDonald House Charities Eastern Wisconsin.
Contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. HWB19

It costs over $100 per night for a family to stay at RMHC, yet we suggest our families make a donation of just $20 a night. No family is ever turned away for their inability to pay. Your ongoing support is a major reason why.

Thank you for your generosity!

Our Mission:
To keep families together and promote the health and well-being of children