

the Hearth

OCTOBER 2009



RONALD McDONALD
HOUSE CHARITIES
WESTERN WASHINGTON & ALASKA

Grace's story



Grace, 7, center, loves playing outdoors with her sisters, Mary, left, and Cassie.

Age: 7 years old

Hometown: Havre, Mont.

Diagnosis: Acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL)

THE GIBSONS are used to wide open spaces. At home on their Montana ranch, the nearest neighbor is five miles away. So when they were told about the Ronald McDonald House, they were hesitant, particularly about communal living.

But after visiting the House, they were blown away. They quickly moved out of their hotel and have been thankful and impressed ever since. Along the way, they formed supportive friendships and enjoyed many House activities.

"Things went from being bleak and not doable, to doable,"

“

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– Grace's mom

”

says Karen, the mother of Grace, 7, who was brought to Seattle in January for treatment.

The family's story started in December when they noticed Grace was always tired. Their energetic girl has always played outdoors with her two younger sisters Mary and Cassie every chance she gets. But during one outing, Grace reached the top of a hill and sat down in the snow, too tired to continue playing. Shortly after, tests revealed cancer.

Days later, Grace was brought to Seattle on a Mercy Flight. Her father, Micah, wanted to be with her on the flight. The plane didn't have enough passenger seats for him, but the pilots made it work by strapping him to a stretcher, where he laid next to Grace the entire flight.

For Grace, the best thing about the House has been the art projects led by volunteers. The family also is appreciative of having enough space for their entire family (which includes Aunt Sandy, who came after Micah went home for calving season). And the family has been thankful for the "friendly and gracious" people they have met in Seattle. "It's taught us all a real lesson in love and humanity," says Karen.

With Grace progressing well in treatment, the family moved back home in late September. She's getting back to her active self and has resumed one of her favorite activities – horseback riding, which she has done since she was 2 years old. She loves riding Buggy and Shelby and looks forward to getting back into competition (barrel racing, for which she's won three belt buckles) and helping Mom and Dad more around the ranch.

"She's a good hand," says Karen.

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LIFE AT THE HOUSE

Heavy duty kitchen gets heavy use – and a whole lot of appreciation

IT'S AROUND MIDNIGHT at the House and Jake, 13, is hungry. If he were at a hotel, chances are that his only option would be something from a vending machine. And even then, his Mom would be reluctant to let him wander the halls.

But since he's at House A, he heads down to the kitchen and into the pantry. "I was able to make myself some mac and cheese," says Jake, who is from the small Eastern Washington town of Twisp.

His mother, Tammy, recounts the story one recent midweek morning as she makes "eggs in a hole" – eggs fried in the middle of a piece of bread that's had a hole cut in it.

Comfort food. Just like home.

"I've been pleasantly surprised since the first day we arrived here at how warm and homey the House is," says Tammy, "and the kitchen is a huge part of that."

The anecdotes are a reminder of how heavily our families use the kitchens at House A and House C. And how we sometimes take them for granted, forgetting the huge undertaking it is to keep them operational – outfitted with industrial-grade appliances and maintained with a busy cleaning schedule.

"We love how invaluable the kitchens have become to our families,"



Commercial cookware is essential at the House.

says RMHC Executive Director Dianna Finnerty. "And along with that it becomes necessary for us to ensure we stock them with appliances and cookware that can stand up to heavy usage."

Consider the appliances just at House A:

48 personal refrigerators; 8 ranges/ovens; 8 dishwashers; 3 freezers; and 1 ice machine.

In addition, the kitchen has small appliances such as microwaves, coffeemakers, toasters, crockpots and cookware, plates and utensils. On top of top of that, it has seating for nearly 200.

All of these items get used. With 80 rooms usually all filled and each room with an average of four people, the House is home to 300-plus people on any given day. The House A kitchen particularly gets heavy use during the more than 225 family dinners that are served annually.

But what about other times of the day – breakfasts, lunches, late-night snacks?

"It gets used all day long," says Tammy. "We find ourselves here all different days and times – and we always see folks coming and going."

Consider a recent late morning. Several people were enjoying coffee. A family's dinner – stew with potatoes and beef – was slow-cooking in a crockpot. Several mothers and grandmothers were preparing small meals for later in the day.

Freezers were stocked to the gills with bins labeled by room number. A dishwasher was running and the floors and ovens would be cleaned later.

"It's quite the operation – and it's obviously a lot of work to keep all of this up and running for us families," says Tammy. "We definitely appreciate it."



We ask families to pay **\$25*** a night to stay at the House. However, no one is ever turned away due to an inability to pay. Most families are struggling financially and often stay for several months or longer.

* Actual cost is \$80 a night.

Yes! I want to help.

Use the attached envelope to pay for a family's stay at the House.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

New look for Activity Nights

ACTIVITY NIGHTS, which are increasingly cited as valuable by our families, are taking on a whole new look this fall.

The House is adding more activities that provide children at the House with entertainment, education – and, of course, fun.

Often the activities will be offered in conjunction with Tuesday and Thursday dinners so that parents can have time relax to and connect with other parents. Some activities, however, will be added on non-dinner days. The possibilities are endless.

"Activities are great for both the parents, who love a little break, and the kids who are so excited to try new things and learn while having some fun," says Manager of Volunteer Services Judy Adams. "Because of this, we've decided to work a little more with groups and find new groups that have special talents to offer."

The House recently added two new ongoing activities: Yoga (for ages 10 and older), which is taught weekly by Liz Dunn; and children's dance, led every other Thursday by All That Dance.

Many groups that have been doing activities will continue. Stampin' Up will continue to do monthly craft activities with kids at the House. Publicis, a new group this year, will continue monthly creative projects. Also, Charlie the Juggling Clown will continue to entertain families quarterly.

Activities should usually be directed toward grade-school age children or younger. Possibilities include arts and crafts; hobby development; music; dance; drama; indoor games; clowns; magic shows; and arranging for a professional group to come in and perform for our families.

Interested? Visit our Web site at rmhcseattle.org and click on "How to Help," then "Volunteer" and look for the section titled "Group Opportunities."

How you can help during the holidays

Toy donations limited to movies, video games, card and board games

THE HOLIDAYS are fast-approaching and many of you in the community are beginning to ask – as you so generously do each year – how you can help during the holidays.

Toys

Toys are the most common item donors are interested in giving. While we always appreciate the kindness behind the gesture, we do need to put some parameters on the types of toys we can accept for the children, who are very ill and often are fighting to stay healthy with compromised immune systems.

We must ask that you limit your toy donations to movies, video games, card and board games and activity books.

A big reason for the limitation is that increasingly widespread toy recalls due to lead content have resulted in new Consumer Product Safety requirements for toys and other children's products. As of August, toys have to be tested and must meet stricter lead content standards in order to be legally sold or distributed to children. Until a larger percentage of toys on the market can be tested and deemed safe, we are required to limit the types of toys we can accept for the children who stay with us.

Also, we are unable to accept stuffed animals at this time because of their susceptibility to carrying germs.

Children still have many opportunities to play at the House, including indoor and outdoor play areas and larger shared toys such as doll houses. We thank you for your understanding.

Gift cards, craft supplies, other ideas

Gift cards, especially to grocery stores, are



Craft supplies, which can be used for fun projects by kids of all ages, are a great holiday season donation.

always appreciated because we then can hand them out to families as needs arise. Craft supplies are always welcome because they can be shared and used in so many ways.

Food

We are always happy to accept non-perishable food to help keep our pantry stocked. We also accept food that has been commercially prepared. However, we are not able to accept home-made items for safety reasons designed to protect the children staying here. That means, for instance, that we cannot accept baked goods or casseroles that were made off-premises.

Thanks for your understanding on all of these important issues and your help in keeping our families healthy during the holidays.

Thank You

We couldn't do it without you!

Thanks to great community support, we're able to provide 28,000 nights of housing per year to families caring for seriously ill children. Here's a snapshot of what a few wonderful community groups did for the House over the past quarter:

Bob's Brown Beer: The annual event, built around the release of a special brew by Georgetown Brewing, raised a record \$45,000 for RMHC!

DirectBuy Charity Ride: The 160-mile motorcycle ride and BBQ raised \$6,000 for RMHC.

Baseball Challenge: The 6th annual event took place in Bellevue this year and raised \$6,000 for RMHC.

Select Comfort-Bellevue Square: Donated 35 pillows, mattresses, pads and blankets, a generous gift worth a total of \$3,000.

OTHER EVENTS/AMOUNT RAISED:

- **4th Annual Wyatt Wilson Memorial Ride, \$4,400**
- **Trick or Treat in the Heat, \$5,000**
- **Wyatt's Ride for the House, \$2,600**

Flu season reminders

We are preparing for a potentially longer and tougher flu season this year, with the H1N1 virus added to our regular, seasonal influenza.

As you might know, catching the flu can be very serious for children with compromised immune systems and this year we are asking our staff and volunteers to be vaccinated for both the regular, seasonal flu and the H1N1 virus and advising them to stay home if

they have flu-like symptoms or if they know they have been exposed to someone who has the flu.

We also have face masks and extra antibacterial soap dispensers around the House and we are furthering preparations by filling our pantry in case we need extra food for families who have to be isolated.

Thanks for your help as we navigate what's predicted to be a worse flu season than normal.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

OCTOBER

17–21st Annual Ronald McDonald House Charities Gala, Sheraton Hotel and Towers, Seattle. Enjoy a fun evening of food, great company, entertainment, bidding on exciting, fun items – all while supporting RMHC in our biggest fundraiser of the year. Honorary

Chairs this year are Chef John and Debbie Howie of Seastar Restaurant. For more information or to purchase tickets, please contact Vanessa Briley at (206) 838-0613.

DECEMBER

8-9—Holidate with the Girls, University Village, Seattle (details below)

WANT EVENT DETAILS and/or a way to keep up on other news at the House?

1. Visit www.rmhcseattle.org
2. Email ellen@rmhcseattle.org
3. Or call Ellen at (206) 838-0629

It's time for another 'Holidate with the Girls'

GRAB YOUR GIRLFRIENDS and head to "Holidate with the Girls" for holiday shopping, toasting and laughter on Dec. 8 and 9 at University Village in Seattle.

Registration is \$25 (\$20 of which is donated to RMHC) and includes a drink and appetizers at Sonrisa, a swag bag filled with goodies from U Village merchants and discount card for 20 percent off at participating Village merchants,

along with other special offers.

Meet up with your friends at Sonrisa sometime between noon and 9 p.m. on either day to pick up your coupon and swag bag, enjoy a drink and appetizers, and enter to win exciting raffle items to benefit the House.

For ticket information, contact Ellen Sontra at (206) 838-0629.

Top 5 Wish List

At the Ronald McDonald House, we need the same kind of items you use at home—only more! Here's how you can help:

- 5 DVD players for residential rooms
- 4 20-inch TV/DVD combos for residential rooms
- 4 27-inch TVs for residential rooms
- \$25 gift cards to Safeway and Target for families
- 10 Professional sheet pans (half-inch size, 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 12 $\frac{7}{8}$) from Seattle Restaurant store

Before donating an item, please contact: kaarin@rmhcseattle.org or call (206) 838-0609.

Thank you
for your generosity!

WWW.RMHCSEATTLE.ORG CALL (206) 838-0600

“The activities and arts and crafts projects put a genuine smile on her face.” – Romi's mom

The House provides about 28,000 nights of housing per year.



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