

# 2025-2030 Impact Strategy



The Browne family

**Serve More Families,  
Serve Them Better**



Ronald McDonald  
House Charities™  
United Kingdom



# A message from Ella Joseph, our Chief Executive



Our mission is fuelled by a deep understanding of the practical and emotional challenges faced by families when they have children in hospital far from home. We are committed to helping families cope and providing the support they need during their child's medical journey.

Since we opened our doors in 1989, families have stayed in our Ronald McDonald Houses over 100,000 times. Our families come from all walks of life, from all over the UK and have diverse needs. We listen to families' incredible stories of hope, recovery, and sometimes heartbreak, and we are inspired to do more. By enhancing our programmes and facilities, we aim to provide a free 'home away from home' for every family in need, allowing them to focus on what truly matters – the health and wellbeing of their child in hospital.

This strategy outlines our vision for serving more families, and serving them better, and how we will evolve our programmes to meet the needs of the communities we serve.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to our supporters, partners, and dedicated staff who make our mission possible. Together, we will continue to build on our legacy of compassion and excellence, creating lasting positive change for families across the UK.

**Ella Joseph**, Chief Executive, Ronald McDonald House Charities UK



## Our purpose

**We help families with children in hospital to cope with the practical and emotional challenges they face.**

Ronald McDonald House Charities UK provides free accommodation and support for families with children in hospital. When families step through our doors, they are transported to a haven of calm, support, and safety, away from the hospital ward.

Here, they find solace among other families experiencing similar journeys and receive unwavering support from our incredible staff. This is the true essence of a Ronald McDonald House.

“It's not a place where we just slept and stayed, it's a place where we could be a family, it's a place where we felt safe, we felt warm, we felt cared for and we had people on our side. And it means a lot more now, as a memory than it did at the time.”

Andrew, dad to Lukas who sadly passed away in 2013, stayed in Ronald McDonald House Manchester with his wife, Katie, and their two other children (pictured right), while Lukas was undergoing specialist medical treatment.



# The urgent need for family support

Imagine having a seriously ill or injured child who requires specialist hospital treatment miles away from home. Imagine staying for several nights or even weeks, months or years. Where would you sleep? How would you keep your family together?

Lifesaving medical care for babies and children often takes place at specialised regional centres, far from families' homes. In the year ending March 2024, children aged 0-18 years old were admitted to hospital more than 2.2 million times.<sup>1</sup> 90,000 of them were babies needing treatment in neonatal units<sup>2</sup> and thousands of children were treated for other serious conditions such as cancer, heart disease, respiratory issues or major trauma incidents.

These numbers suggest that tens of thousands of children stay in hospital for extended periods each year. We are the leading provider of family accommodation in the UK and have 529 bedrooms available for families each night of the year. On average, families stay in a Ronald McDonald House for 18 nights, but this can extend to months or even years – to date, our longest staying family was with us for more than four years.

The challenges faced by these families are immense – parents and carers are often left exhausted. In addition to the emotional strain of worrying about their child in hospital, they are burdened with intense stress over extended periods.



Ronald McDonald House Tooting

## Practical and financial pressures:

Families who stay in a Ronald McDonald House live an average distance of 81 miles from home to the hospital.<sup>3</sup> Without free accommodation, parents can end up sleeping in their cars or on uncomfortable hospital chairs, or where available, pull-down beds on the ward. Otherwise, staying near the hospital for extended periods can cost families on average more than £1,800 in hotel expenses.<sup>4</sup>

We know that having a child in hospital is expensive and creates additional pressure on families, many of whom are already struggling financially. For example, a national survey during the cost-of-living crisis found 45% of British adults had difficulty keeping up with household bills and credit commitments at that time,<sup>5</sup> whilst our survey of families staying in a Ronald McDonald House revealed that figure was as high as 65% of families.<sup>6</sup>

# 96%

of families staying with us strongly agreed that they would have found it difficult to stay close to their child either financially or otherwise without a Ronald McDonald House.<sup>7</sup>



BB Financially, the House was a huge help, as it meant I did not have to keep traveling to Burnley and back [to Royal Manchester Children's Hospital]. I don't know how we would have managed with fuel costs, and we wouldn't have been able to afford hotel accommodation. BB

Ashleigh and her family stayed in Ronald McDonald House Manchester when baby Georgia (pictured with brother), was born with serious medical issues.

## Emotional pressures:

For families to be involved in medical discussions, and to provide emotional support for their child, maintaining their own wellbeing is essential. But when a child is in hospital away from home, parents and carers struggle with getting enough rest, eating properly and generally looking after their own wellbeing. Daily routines are completely disrupted, which has a significant impact on the whole family.

The stress families face is worsened by hospital-related anxiety and uncertainty and is often compounded by parents feeling distant from their own support networks, family and friends. There is also evidence that parents of children in paediatric wards can experience significant post-traumatic stress symptoms after their child's discharge.<sup>8</sup>

## The solution: The Ronald McDonald House

In the 1970s, Dr Audrey Evans, a pioneer in the world of child cancer, saw that when a child is sick, the whole family is affected. Dr Evans dreamt of a place for families to call home for the duration of their child's hospital treatment, and that dream is now a reality in more than 60 countries around the world. We were established as an independent charity in the UK in 1989 and we now have Houses at 14 NHS hospitals, serving more than 8,000 families per year.

Ronald McDonald Houses keep families close to their children in hospital, giving them as much time as they need to be with their children. Houses are in or near hospitals, alleviating the need to travel long distances from home. We also focus on programmes that give time back to families, such as Grab & Go, where families can pick up snacks and take them over to the wards, or offering to clean their bedroom. All these efforts enable families to concentrate solely on what truly matters – the health and wellbeing of their child.

BB Before we had the bedroom in the House, we were having to travel for three hours each day to look after our two older children and doing school runs – not leaving very much time to spend with Araya in hospital. Staying at the House gives us, as a family, more time to spend with our daughter when she needs us the most, and that means the world to us all. DD

Kate stayed with her family in Ronald McDonald House Manchester when Araya (pictured) was treated for a rare neurological condition.



BB At times where my anxiety was 'through the roof', both the Camberwell House and Evelina London House kept me comforted and supported, offering me more than just a place to stay. Ronald McDonald House Charities UK holds a special place in my heart. DD

Vicky and her family stayed in our Houses when her six-year-old daughter had a brain tumour, and a few years later when her son was born with a rare medical condition.

We also prioritise the wellbeing of families who stay with us. Our Ronald McDonald Houses are designed to help families maintain their daily routines, whether it's sharing a meal together, enjoying fresh air in the garden, or playing with toys in the playroom; these moments help families regain a sense of normalcy, crucial during times of crisis.

We also strive to cultivate a sense of community and belonging for families in our Houses, ensuring they feel supported and connected during their stay. And our wide range of additional services, from fun activities for visiting siblings to free wellbeing apps, address the holistic needs of families, supporting their physical and emotional wellbeing.

# 80%

of hospital administrators surveyed worldwide believe Ronald McDonald Houses help families feel less isolated.<sup>9</sup>

BB Meeting Emma and her family was such a blessing during my stay at the House. We bonded over our shared experiences, voiced our similar concerns, and vented frustrations together. We became close friends and have seen each other regularly ever since. DD

Katie stayed in Ronald McDonald House Brighton when her daughter, Dulcie-Lou, was born prematurely. Katie became friends with Emma whose son Arthur was also born prematurely.



Ronald McDonald House Manchester day room.

## The impact of our Houses

The impact of Ronald McDonald Houses on families is significant. Giving families time with their child and supporting their wellbeing not only helps them cope with challenges that come their way but also means their children in hospital get the family support they need.

- **Helping families cope:** The support system provided by staying in a Ronald McDonald House, along with efforts to help reduce practical burdens, helps families cope with the stresses of life on the children's ward. When caring for critically ill patients, resilient family members report fewer symptoms of anxiety, depression and stress, so interventions that build resilience, such as exercise and mindfulness activities, could enhance family experiences, even in intensive care settings.<sup>10</sup>
- **Essential emotional support for children in hospital:** being close by ensures that parents can provide the comfort and reassurance their child in hospital needs. For babies, early bonding with caregivers is crucial and it affects long-term mental health and resilience.<sup>11</sup> Families staying in Ronald McDonald Houses report more positive hospital experiences and greater participation in their child's care<sup>12</sup>.

# 100%

of families surveyed agreed that the services and support they received at the Ronald McDonald House helped them cope during their child's hospital stay.

### 2021 – 2024:

- We provided free accommodation to more than 25,000 families.
- In total, we saved families from travelling 42 million miles from home to hospital and back.
- We expanded our capacity, by adding an additional 129 family bedrooms to our network with Ronald McDonald Houses in Liverpool and Bristol and opening a brand-new House in Edinburgh.
- We provided more than 5,700 Day Passes to families not staying overnight in a House, so they could use our services during the daytime.
- We facilitated more than 17,000 visits from children in hospital to spend time with their families in our Houses, via our Medical Pass programme.
- We invested in our facilities for families by completing refurbishments in multiple Houses, including in London, Manchester, Brighton, Birmingham and Liverpool.
- In collaboration with McDonald's, we opened 12 sustainable play areas made from recycled Happy Meal toys.
- We launched 'Grab & Go', a new programme providing convenient snacks for families completely free of charge.



Ronald McDonald House Birmingham play area

## Serve more families

We currently partner with 14 NHS hospitals across the UK, accommodating more than 8,000 families each year, but there are thousands more who need our support. Our hospital partners and families have also highlighted the need for daytime facilities where parents can spend time away from the wards, cook a meal, or take a break while their children receive treatment.

To address these needs, over the next five years, we have set key goals to serve more families:

### Expanding accommodation

This is essential to accommodate more families and reduce waiting times for a bedroom in our Houses. We are talking with multiple NHS trusts who need a Ronald McDonald House. By gathering data and insights, including levels of unmet demand for family accommodation, we aim to determine where our next project should be and identify any existing Houses that might need expansion. **Our goal is to prioritise and identify our next expansion projects by the end of 2029.**

### Expanding the Day Pass programme

In addition to expanding our accommodation, we plan to enhance our Day Pass programme, which offers daytime facilities to families who need rest and respite during hospital visits. During the day, families staying with us are primarily on the hospital wards with their children. The Day Pass programme was created to fully utilise our facilities around the clock and extend our support to even more families. These day facilities include kitchens, lounges, laundry rooms, gardens, and bathrooms. In 2024, we issued almost 3,000 Day Passes, and **our ambition is to double the number of yearly passes used by families by the end of 2029.** We will do this by raising awareness of the Day Pass programme amongst NHS staff and families, and ensure our facilities meet the needs of our families.

“Seeing and hearing the difference our day facilities make to families is so wonderful – whether it's while they are waiting for their child to come out of a lengthy operation, popping over to wash their newborn baby's clothes, having a comfortable place to meet extended family for a brew and a hug or just taking five minutes for themselves to freshen up in the shower – our day facilities give everyone such an emotional boost, comfort and practical support, at a time when they need it most.”

Sally Cannon (pictured), Ronald McDonald House Manager, Manchester





## Serve families better

NHS medical teams tell us that it is vital to have a place for families to live close-by during their child's hospital treatment. Alongside this, parents must also receive the support they need to alleviate the practical and emotional challenges they face.

A recent study indicates that families would greatly benefit from additional services such as counselling and access to free food, particularly when they have other children staying with them.<sup>13</sup> We recognise the need to enhance our support programmes and ensure consistent delivery across our Houses.

To address these needs, over the next five years, we have set key goals to serve families better:

### Assured Standard

First, we will establish an Assured Standard to ensure each Ronald McDonald House meets our set standards of accommodation and service. **By the end of 2029, we want all our Houses to be delivering this Standard to ensure consistency for every family.** This will also help us focus on the environmental sustainability of our frontline operations.

### Improved family support initiatives

We aim to improve family support initiatives by addressing the diverse needs of families. Through comprehensive research, we have identified which existing programmes we need to improve, and which additional services we need to offer. To respond to families' needs, we will **improve and grow the support we offer by the end of 2029.**

## To support family wellbeing, we will:

- Enhance the **signposting** we provide to families regarding information and support from local community, regional and national charities and services.
- Seek to collaborate with a mental health provider to pilot an **emotional wellbeing service** for families.
- Pilot a joint '**step-down**' programme with an NHS partner to help families build confidence in returning home with their child.
- Work with our NHS partners to identify enhancements that will enable more children in hospitals to use our **Medical Passes** and spend time with their families in our Houses.
- Ensure all bedrooms have comfortable, **ergonomic support mattresses**.
- Review how we support families through **free wellbeing apps** and make improvements based on their feedback.
- Continue to partner with local businesses to provide **self-care sessions** for parents and carers, such as hairdressers, massage and yoga.
- Continue to organise **fun activities for children**, visiting siblings and other family members in our Houses.

## To alleviate time pressures on families, we will:

- Review our '**Grab & Go**' food programme and ensure it is delivered consistently across our Houses.
- Introduce free **communal pantries** regularly stocked with nutritious ingredients.
- Introduce **tea trays** in bedrooms and fridges for breastfeeding mums where needed.
- Launch a new service, ensuring each **bedroom is regularly cleaned** by our staff and volunteers.
- Invest in our **remote working and studying facilities** with improved Wi-Fi and seating.





The Hempstead family.

# How we will achieve our goals

This is an ambitious strategy for supporting families across the UK. To achieve our goals, we will need to focus on four key pillars of work.

## Grow and diversify our income

The key priority is to continue growing a strong and loyal group of supporters who believe in our cause. In these challenging economic times, it's crucial that we clearly show the difference every supporter and organisation makes, whether they contribute their time or money. Our focus is on making our fundraising smarter and more innovative, investing in the basics now to ensure we can grow our income sustainably. We are aiming to boost our voluntary income from £14.5 million in 2024 to more than £20 million a year by 2029. To do this, we will need to use our strong brand to our advantage, and find new ways to grow through major donors, corporate partnerships, and digital fundraising.

## Build strategic partnerships

Collaborating with the right partners will supercharge our fundraising efforts and help us deliver the services our families need. McDonald's will remain our founding and forever partner, driving brand visibility and fundraising efforts, while the NHS will continue to be our most important delivery partner. We also aim to expand our corporate partnerships as well as build on the brilliant community partnerships that provide essential support and resources for families. By joining forces with valuable partners, we can enhance our impact and better support the families we serve.

## Nurture our talent

Our talented team is poised to deliver this strategy, and we are deeply committed to their development and recognising their achievements. We aim to create an environment where every team member can thrive by offering opportunities for professional growth, training, and skill enhancement. We are dedicated to fostering a culture of belonging, championing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) to ensure everyone feels valued and respected. By nurturing a diverse and inclusive workplace, we pave the way for innovation, collaboration, and success. Our goal is to empower our team to reach their full potential, drive organisational growth, and achieve excellence in all we do.

## Strengthen our foundations

The essential support we provide to families has a far-reaching positive impact on communities. We are committed to expanding our social impact by embedding Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles, including maximising the environmental sustainability of our Houses. This strategy will be supported by a new approach to data collection, allowing us to better understand the needs of our families and tailor our services accordingly. By developing a new impact framework, we will demonstrate our commitment to being a trusted partner in the communities where we operate. We are also excited to continue to embrace technology to improve the services we offer families and to reach new audiences.

## Ronald McDonald House Alder Hey

We plan to improve the facilities and services offered at our Ronald McDonald House in Liverpool, next to Alder Hey Children's Hospital. The multimillion-pound investment will create more communal spaces such as kitchens and lounges, helping to foster a greater sense of community in the House, and the ability to provide new support programmes. We will also be investing in the ground floor day room, to open the Day Pass Programme to more families who need us.

“ We are really excited to hear about the significant investments planned for Ronald McDonald House Alder Hey... enhancements are critical to meet the ever-changing needs of our growing number of children, young people, and their families.

We strive to lead the way with high quality healthcare through our modern and innovative hospital. A transformed Ronald McDonald House will allow for improved collaboration to provide full wrap-around care and will help us towards achieving our vision of offering an unrivalled experience for families.”

Nathan Askew, Chief Nursing, Allied Health Professional and Experience Officer, Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust

# Family story

In July 2021, amidst the unexpected whirlwind of premature labour, Ruth found herself rushed to Princess Anne Hospital in Southampton, leaving behind her daily life and any sense of normality.

With her husband, Andy, away at sea with the Navy, she was alone with 11-month-old daughter Gabi, when their son, Ezra, arrived prematurely at just 26 weeks, weighing less than 2lbs. When Andy was flown back the next day, Ronald McDonald House Southampton became their sanctuary.

BB Ronald McDonald House Southampton became our lifeline, offering us a room within 24 hours. DD

Mum-of-two, Ruth (pictured right with her husband Andy and their children)



BB Keeping Gabi with me while Ezra was in hospital made such a difference in our lives. It allowed us to keep her in a somewhat normal routine. She could have her naps, hot meals, bath, and bed at the House.

"Without the Ronald McDonald House, I can't imagine how we would have managed. We might have ended up sleeping in our car or staying somewhere far from the hospital, making it difficult to be there for Ezra each day.

"The House lifted an enormous burden from our shoulders – we didn't have to worry about food and travel costs, and we could cook proper meals instead of relying on expensive takeaways. Most importantly, we were just moments away from Ezra's bedside if his condition changed. Having a safe place so close to him made all the difference. DD

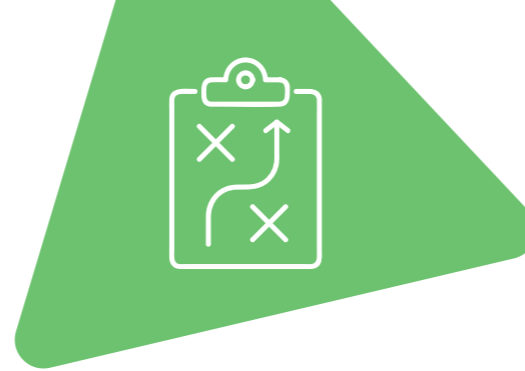
Ezra was diagnosed with achondroplasia, a type of dwarfism, leading to numerous hospital admissions for respiratory issues and other complications. The family faced the heart-wrenching ordeal of being told to prepare for the worst more than once, while Ezra battled for his life in the Intensive Care Unit.

Over the ensuing months, and through multiple stays totalling 493 days, the House offered more than just a roof over their heads. It became a home where their daughter Gabi could grow and thrive. The staff, affectionately dubbed by Gabi as her 'uncles' and 'aunties', celebrated her milestones, from her first steps to her birthdays.



# References

- <sup>1</sup> Hospital Episode Statistics, NHS England
- <sup>2</sup> [www.bliss.org.uk/research-campaigns/neonatal-care-statistics](http://www.bliss.org.uk/research-campaigns/neonatal-care-statistics)
- <sup>3</sup> RMHC UK 2021-24 beneficiary data
- <sup>4</sup> RMHC UK November 2024 Accommodation Costs. Average cost of stay based on off peak November 2024 prices of two nearest hotels to each Ronald McDonald House, and the average length of stay in each House.
- <sup>5</sup> YouGov, StepChange Debt Charity, 2022
- <sup>6</sup> Cost of Living Report, RMHC UK, 2023
- <sup>7</sup> Ronald McDonald House Charities UK check out surveys, 2023
- <sup>8</sup> Predictors of Parent Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms after Child Hospitalization on General Paediatric Wards: A Prospective Cohort Study, RMHC UK, Franck et al., 2014
- <sup>9</sup> Hospital Leadership Perspectives on the Contributions of Ronald McDonald Houses: Results from an International Survey, Lantz et al., 2015
- <sup>10</sup> The Association between Resilience and Family Member Psychological Symptoms in Critical Illness, Sottile et al., 2017
- <sup>11</sup> The importance of early bonding on the long-term mental health and resilience of children, Winston, Chicot, 2013
- <sup>12</sup> The influence of family accommodation on paediatric hospital experience in Canada. Franck et al. 2017.
- <sup>13</sup> Family Discovery Research, RMHC UK, 2022



**Together, we can help families with children in hospital cope with the practical, emotional and financial challenges they face.**



“ The warmth of the welcome and the kindness in the team’s eyes as they showed my husband around – it was the first moment since this nightmare began that we felt we could breathe. We met other parents walking the same terrifying path, sharing quiet cups of tea and understanding looks that said more than words ever could. The House team wrapped our family in a blanket of support that helped us face each day. ”

Louise and Louis, stayed at Ronald McDonald House Brighton when their baby Maya was born at just 1lb 8oz.



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