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The Cleveland Ronald McDonald House’s Ideals:

An Organization Built For Empathy

If you have ever had a trademark McDonald’s Shamrock Shake, then you are probably exactly like everyone else, either not minding the reasons why it was brought on the market or jumped to the conclusion that it was a good product created to generate profit. Or perhaps you are one of the few to know the real story. The McDonald’s Shamrock Shake was first marketed to finance a worldwide organization that provides outreach to millions of children and families each year.

Forty-four years ago, in 1971, Fred Hill, a tight end for the Philadelphia Eagles, experienced disaster; his 3 year old daughter was diagnosed with leukemia. In 3 years of agony spent in St. Christopher's Hospital for Children, the tragedy gave Hill the perception about a social concern that was widespread, but previously unidentified and unattended. With his time spent in the hospital, Hill watched the medical bills climb for himself and families around him. Along with others stuck in the same situation, Hill, unable to afford housing and food, would make his living arrangements from what the hospital had to offer him: chairs and vending machines (Ronald McDonald House of Albany, n.d.).

Hill and his supporters knew there was a better answer than their makeshift campsites. Enlisting the help of his teammates and local doctors, Hill was able to solicit the McDonald’s advertising agency to create a new promotion for both his vision and the corporation itself: the St. Patrick’s Day Green Milkshake, currently known as the Shamrock Shake. With every shake purchased, McDonald’s dedicated a portion of the income to Frank Hill’s cause, prominently creating the organization which proudly brandishes the McDonald’s name today (A. Powel, personal communication, September 28, 2015). Funds raised were allocated for purchasing an old house near the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. On October 15, 1974, Fred Hill and the McDonald’s Corporation opened the home, which has flourished into an international organization providing critical service to its distressed patrons (Ronald McDonald House of Albany, n.d.). Cleveland’s Ronald McDonald House is an essential contributor to the community as it continues to serve thousands of families annually whose children receive medical attention at local area hospitals by providing empathetic lodging with the indispensable resource of hope through practical services. This paper will first describe the Cleveland Ronald McDonald House’s basic programs and services and then discuss the organization’s purpose and its resulting public reputation.

On the outskirts of downtown Cleveland, Ohio, the Ronald McDonald House is an outstanding chapter among its counterparts due to its comparatively exceptional program outreach. Of the current 349 nonprofit organizational homes[[1]](#footnote-1), 196 Family Rooms have been established, of which the Cleveland’s Ronald McDonald House is rare, in that it supports multiple family rooms and is the only Ohio chapter to even employ the program. At the Cleveland Clinic, MetroHealth, Fairview Hospital, and Rainbow Babies & Children’s Hospital, the local chapter and the national organization aspire to comfort the families and reduce as much strain as possible by providing an extension of their service (A. Powel, personal communication, September 28, 2015). These rooms offer a variety of amenities that may vary between family rooms, but often include facilities managed by volunteers from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., a kitchen area, shower spaces, sleeping rooms, laundry facilities, internet access, medical reference books, a quiet space, and a television (Ronald McDonald House of Cleveland, n.d.b). Once a family has been registered, any and all healthy guests carrying valid hospital identification are welcome to use the facilities, with the exception of children, who must be accompanied and monitored by an adult at all times. In an effort for children to heal and cope better, the Family Room program offers a comfortable living space at the hospital, a place that feels like home while the family can rest only a moment’s notice away from their sick child (Ronald McDonald House of Cleveland, n.d.b).

At times when a family has a sick child, the family may wait hours or, in some cases, days before they are able or wish to leave. As a supplement to the Family Room program, the Cleveland Ronald McDonald House with the collaboration of other chapters has innovated upon their service. Relatively new to the organization, the Happy Wheels program aims to “provide a bit of comfort as it travels the hospital hallways, bringing parents a hot beverage and snack while keeping the little ones entertained with books, fun activities, and toys” (Ronald McDonald House of Stanford, n.d.). The Cleveland Ronald McDonald House’s Happy Wheels cart frequently visits patients and families in “Pediatric Oncology, EEG Monitoring, Pediatric Intensive Care and M40 Units” (Ronald McDonald House of Cleveland, n.d.b). The cart itself is the average mobile hospitality cart, but it provides comforting items to those who are in the most need and those who are the most stressed.

Yet another program sponsored by Cleveland’s Ronald McDonald House and specially devised for the local area chapter to “empower” families dealing with illness is the Red Treehouse Organization (Red Treehouse, n.d.a). In its operation, the Red Tree House Organization provides resources, support networks, reliability, and hope in an effort to establish an encouraging online community to aid families with children from prenatal ages to young adulthood (Red Treehouse, n.d.b). This program is entirely in web-application formatting to offer individuals—even those outside the direct reach of the Cleveland Ronald McDonald House organization—the service and help of a new and inspiring online community.

As opposed to the aforementioned programs, the social mission of the houses themselves is conducted onsite and nearly mirrors the business model of a common hotel; however, unlike a regular business hotel, the Ronald McDonald House’s ideals are superiorly empathetic for the care of its visiting patrons. The Ronald McDonald House organization upholds its social mission, to provide affordable housing to families with ill children, through flexibility in its payment plan. Instead of a mandatory fee imposed on its guests at a price meant to generate profit, the Ronald McDonald House asks for, but does not require, a sensible donation of $20 each night. On average, Cleveland’s Ronald McDonald House receives half of their payment requests for their 55 rooms each month, either from the families themselves or, in rare cases, through some form of secondary insurance. Even without donation, guests will enjoy room and board at the expense of the organization in an attempt to ease the financial burden that families with sick children would experience housed in other locations (A. Powel, personal communication, September 28, 2015).

In the local community, the Ronald McDonald House performs a critical function as a provider of affordable housing to children with sick families; it is a unique organization locally and worldwide in providing a great level of care at such affordable rates. As a result of the generous and empathetic service, the community is wholeheartedly supportive, encouraging, and respectful of the organization. However, the organization’s charitable service is not the only deed capturing public approval. Lately, the house has granted many scholarships to the community and provided its service to troubled families, all while not being involved in any identifiable or publicly known scandals. In return for the organization’s public services, the community responds by volunteering for the organization and committing resources from fundraising opportunities to the home and its programs.

In an effort to maintain its praise, the Cleveland Ronald McDonald House consistently adheres to a mandatory set of guidelines. These guidelines include a set of core values that define the standards on which the organization wants to be judged: “compassion, … inclusiveness, … quality, …innovation, … teamwork, … [and] trust” (Ronald McDonald House of Cleveland, n.d.a). The organization values its public reputation to such an extent that it incorporates a wishful reputational standard within its social mission: “The Ronald McDonald House of Cleveland will be recognized for excellence in providing essential services with compassion to diverse families whose children are facing medical challenges,” (Ronald McDonald House of Cleveland, n.d.a). The organization is striving for community support with its core values in mind. By continuously adhering to its social mission, the house can only be viewed positively by the community while it continues to uphold its integrity. In the meantime, while the Ronald McDonald House remains reliable as a community advocate, it is the job of the local area to respond with continued support for the organization. Whether it be the community’s volunteerism, or charitable donations, the Ronald McDonald House requests your assistance.

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1. The Ronald McDonald House homes are specifically designated 501(c)3 charitable organizations as declared by Federal and State Law, and the Internal Revenue Service. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)