

Ronald McDonald House to open at local hospital, a first for Africa

 By Jessica Tennant

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The objective of the Ronald McDonald House is to ensure that families stay together on-site, during the hospitalisation of their child. It also helps the doctors stay in constant contact with the parents, should they need them at short notice. Nothing else should matter when a family is focused on their child's health; not where they can afford to stay, how they can pay for transport or where they will get their next meal.

“Helping a sick child fight their illness takes a big enough emotional toll on a family, let alone the financial strain. McDonald’s understood the need to improve the lives of children and their families during difficult times by creating the Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC). RMHC was founded more than 41 years ago in Philadelphia, US and is currently in 63 countries and regions, however the Ronald McDonald House at the Nelson Mandela Children’s Hospital is a first for Africa,” says Sphiwe Reggie Skhosana, RMHC SA chairman.



Pat Thekisho, Greg Solomon, Dr Dorothy Sekhukhune, Dr Lea Chirwa and Reggie Skhosana.

On Mandela Day, Skhosana hosted media and investors at the new hospital in Parktown for a hard hat tour of the development. The house is scheduled to open in December 2016. “We are very excited to be part of Madiba’s last wish and are certain that he would be delighted at the addition of a facility to accommodate families in a time of crisis,” he says.

The house will function as a home-away-from-home for 27 affected families so that they can stay close to their hospitalised child, at no charge. At the house, families will have access to:

- Clean, comfortable, secure environment to live in that is close to their child
- Home cooked meals
- Private bedrooms
- Playrooms for children
- Supportive staff and volunteers who are there to listen and lend a helping hand in any way they can

Here, Skhosana explains everything from how the opportunity to establish the home at the hospital presented itself, to RMHC SA’s plans to roll out three core programmes nationally, including the Ronald McDonald House...

■ **With 27 rooms, how does one decide who is allowed to stay there and for how long?**

The hospital social worker is the one who will refer the families to the house and decide case by case which families have the greatest need to be near their sick child. If there is no space available, the family will go onto a waiting list and will be placed as accommodation becomes available.

■ **How did the opportunity to establish a home at the hospital present itself?**

The Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital Trust met with the RMHC global office in the US to look at an option to offer accommodation for families at the new hospital. The local RMHC chapter negotiated the current relationship.

■ **How many jobs has this initiative created to date?**

We have six full-time staff and are currently recruiting for various positions. The applications have been overwhelming and interviews are under way.

■ **Mention some volunteer opportunities.**

Volunteers are the backbone of RMHC SA and critical to our success in serving the families and children that need our support. There are many ways one can help from cleaning, making beds and cooking a meal for families staying at the house to donating foodstuffs and helping with administration work, or assisting at fundraising events. Any volunteered time is appreciated.

■ **Are there plans to open another house elsewhere?**

Our three core programmes are:

1. *Ronald McDonald Family Rooms*: located in hospital and service the neonatal and paediatric wards. In 2013, we launched two Family Rooms at Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital, which cater to 100 mothers daily, making them some of the busiest in the world.

- *Ronald McDonald Care Mobile*: A clinic on wheels that offers medical services such as vaccinations, dental or eye treatment to children in rural and peri-urban areas, to be launched in 2017.

- *Ronald McDonald House*: Located at the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital to be opened in December 2016.

We plan to roll out our three core programmes nationally, ie Ronald McDonald Family Room, Ronald McDonald Care Mobile and Ronald McDonald House. We are currently considering public hospitals where there is a need for our services.



■ **How is this being funded? Who are your supporters, and have there been or are there any campaigns aimed at encouraging companies and/or your customers to support the initiative?**

RMHC SA is McDonald's South Africa's charity of choice and its largest corporate donor, however there is a need to bridge a gap in funding and finish the house before the hospital opens in December 2016.

The target to build the house is R15m, with R13m raised to date by McDonald's SA and Standard Bank. Digistics is another valued donor, along with other generous cash and in kind contributions from both corporates and individuals. McDonald's SA has also committed to 60% of operational costs for the first five years. I'd like to extend a call for donors to come on board and assist us in keeping families close to their sick children.

To become a donor, email info@rmhcsouthafrica.org or drop your contribution in a donations box at any McDonald's restaurant. For more information, go to www.rmhcsouthafrica.org.

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