



Sophie was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at only 12 weeks old.



While doctors focus on saving the lives of kids like Sophie, RMHC NZ ensures their families never have to worry about staying together.



Sophie and her family stayed at Ronald McDonald House in Auckland during her treatment.

A childhood rebuilt with support

Sophie's journey shows why McHappy Season makes a difference to families and communities around Aotearoa.

Stories like Sophie Stocker's are at the heart of McHappy Season at Macca's.

At 12 weeks old, Sophie was diagnosed with cerebral palsy and her parents were told she'd never walk or talk.

Suddenly, the devastated family was facing an uncertain future – one of endless hospital visits and back-and-forth travel between Auckland and their home in Kaitiāia, all while juggling the needs of four other children.

Over the next six years, Sophie would present at Auckland's Starship Children's Hospital every six weeks or less; but thanks to Ronald McDonald House Charities® New Zealand (RMHC NZ), the family never had to worry about accommodation. The charity provided safe, comfortable housing, home-cooked meals, friendly faces, and a safe haven away from the ward, offering a silver lining during a difficult time.

When the Stockers first arrived at RMHC NZ, they were exhausted from the five-hour drive and terrified for 12-week-old Sophie, whose impaired bowel meant flying was too risky. They found comfort in RMHC NZ, which quickly became a home away from home.

"On arrival, Ronald McDonald House was ready for us with welcoming arms and provided a safe place for my dad and sister to stay while mum was with me in hospital. I was there for 10 days, undergoing different investigations and treatment. This was just the beginning of many stays there. All stress was alleviated by the ready accommodation for our urgent presentations to Starship," Sophie recalls.

"They provided meals, friendly faces, and a homely environment in a concrete jungle so foreign to us. It made the journey much less daunting."

After Sophie was given the initial diagnosis of cerebral palsy, her mum, fraught with worry, found solace in other families and staff at RMHC NZ.

"My mum recalls the only way she was able to get through that next week or so was because of the support from the other parents and staff at Ronald McDonald House – those who had similar experiences and could wrap loving arms around my



Sophie is now a registered nurse at the Starship Children's Emergency Department.

whānau in a time of desperation and devastation," Sophie continues.

Now aged 22, Sophie has defied all odds. She began to walk at 12 months, and at 3 she began to talk. Cerebral palsy and a later diagnosis of syndactyly were ruled out.

"Somehow, those diagnoses faded away, the grief alleviated with support from RMHC NZ, and I had an incredible childhood," Sophie says.

"Though I still would present to Starship every 6 weeks or less for kidney infections, surgeries, investigations – you name it – the trauma was replaced with fond memories of Ronald McDonald House. Playing in the playground, creating art in their art room, delicious home-cooked meals, meeting Santa, getting my face painted, and watching island dancers on Christmas Day – making Ronald McDonald House my home in the spaces between treatments at Starship."

After spending years of her life in the care of Starship Hospital, Sophie wanted to return the favour. Today, the 22-year-old is happy, healthy, and a registered nurse at the Starship Children's Emergency Department.

She attributes her nursing career not only to healthcare workers but also to the staff at RMHC NZ who looked after her and her whānau during some of their toughest days.

While doctors focus on saving the lives of Kiwi kids like Sophie, RMHC NZ ensures their families never have to worry about where to sleep, what to eat, or how to stay together.

"Each visit to Ronald McDonald House felt like coming home to family. They were part of my journey. They saw me when I was 12 weeks old and watched me grow," she says. "My childhood would be so different and I probably wouldn't be where I am today without it."

As the founding mission partner, McDonald's franchisees, crew members, teams, and customers have provided vital support to help families like Sophie's stay together. Last year alone they raised a record-breaking \$2.9 million for RMHC NZ, showing how collective small actions can lead to life-changing outcomes.

This year, McDonald's is welcoming the return of McHappy Season, its biggest annual in-restaurant fundraiser that supports the life-changing work of RMHC NZ. From October 22 to November 1, Kiwis can get involved by purchasing McDonaldland cookies for \$3, with all proceeds going to the charity. Customers can also collect McDonaldland stickers, and on McHappy Day (November 1), \$1 from every Big Mac sold will go to RMHC NZ – helping local families stay together when their child is in a hospital away from home.

This McHappy Season, head into your local Macca's and make a difference for families across Aotearoa. Visit mcdonalds.co.nz/rmhc for more information.



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