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Ronald McDonald House Casts a Wider Net by Helping Families of Conductive Learning Center Students

Home away from home offers families respite and a strong sense of community.

Grand Rapids, Michigan – In increasing numbers, families carrying the dearest of cargo arrive at the Ronald McDonald House, 1323 Cedar NE, for a five- or six-week stay. They trip over the geographies so that their children, all of whom have some type of motor disabilities, can attend sessions at the new Conductive Learning Center (CLC), 2428 Burton SE.

"As soon as I heard of the CLC I knew it presented a way for us to expand our service population and contacted them right away," says Nancy Ney, executive director of Ronald McDonald House. The CLC, designed to help children with disabilities like cerebral palsy or spina bifida, is one of only a few such centers in the country. Using "conductive education" principles developed by the Hungarian Peto Institute, the CLC works to help kids with motor challenges achieve optimal independence and cognitive function.

But five or six weeks in a hotel or motel would represent an impossible burden for many of the families. That's where the Ronald McDonald House comes in.

"It's an inexpensive play to stay," says Ms. Ney noting that families are asked to pay \$10 or \$20, or nothing if they can't afford to pay." The house has 17 bedrooms, communal kitchens dining room, sunroom, toddler playroom and a large recreation facility. And since the house sits on a five-acre site, families can also take advantage of the site's scenic and recreational potential – weather permitting. Families without transportation and provided with shuttle service.

"One of the greatest things I see is that a child who is seen as 'different' in their own school setting can come here and live together with many other kids who have similar kinds of challenges. But here they feel like regular kids. The boost in self esteem, not to mention the lasting friendships that are often forged... it's just wonderful to see," Nancy explains.

The Ronald McDonald House receives no funds – but does get in-kind support – from the McDonald Foundation. All funds for the House are raised locally and benefit any families with children 21 and younger who need a place to stay.

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