

Marlow sits quietly in her mom's lap and plays with a doll as her mom recounts their experiences of staying at the House. They are about to head home, although Marlow will return to The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) weekly for treatment and Ronald McDonald House Toronto will continue to be her family's "home away from home" for these shorter visits to Toronto.

Diagnosed with Rhabdomyosarcoma (cancer) in 2011 at just two-and-a-half years old, Marlow received her initial treatments in both Kingston and Ottawa before starting treatment at SickKids in Toronto late last autumn. At first the family tried to make do with exhausting day trips or renting a hotel room in Toronto, but when Marlow was admitted to SickKids for twelve days and later an eight-week stint of radiation, Ronald McDonald House Toronto became the ideal option.

Her mom was impressed by how comfortable the House is and the respectful boundaries of staff and volunteers. "I liked how you could function as your family within this House without feeling like somebody was watching. If you need staff, they're here, but other than that it's very hands off for you to go about your business, which is very nice. I like that."

"I was really surprised that you could take your family unit and transplant it here and function as best as you can, and when you could, there were activities to do." Marlow and her family participated in almost every program and activity the House offers, including Woodworking, Yoga, Kids' Gym, Creative Arts and Movie Night. "Marlow loved the PJ Night!" They were excited to be in the House when the Blue Jays came to visit. Marlow and her family also took part in Child Life, a program that helps ease a child's anxiety and assists all family members in coping with the stress of their situation. "I loved the Child Life Program. They really understand kids, and kids who are sick, and the variety of experiences that come with that".

During their stays at the House, Marlow and her family have developed many supportive friendships. "We've managed to meet other families and the reality is that these are the only people that really get what we're dealing with. We've also managed to help other families struggling and you carry that burden with you but it's nice to know you've helped someone else".

Marlow's mom hopes that donors and volunteers are aware of how thankful she and her family are: "Thank you doesn't seem to be enough. I haven't quite figured out how I'm going to express that and how do you thank everybody? I just have to hope that they get to hear the sincerity in our words and know that they've made a difficult journey easier. And that's a blessing for a lot of families. Many of the families here are struggling financially, especially the ones who have been doing this for a while, and a lot of us are proud and this is a humbling experience to go through. To know that you're in people's

minds and they want to help and do something, and even if it's the smallest of things, it's going to help somebody here.”