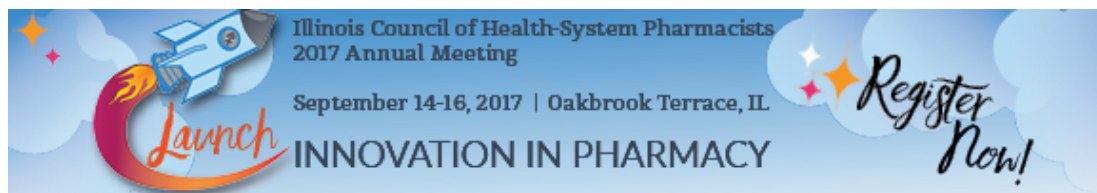




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Volunteering at Ronald McDonald House Meals from the Heart

by Florence Garza, P3, SSHP President, Chicago State University College of Pharmacy

Ronald McDonald House Charities in Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana is a non-profit organization that has been serving the community for 40 years. They serve families whose children are sick and in the hospital getting the care they need. The organization assists in free housing that is near each family's hospitalized child, allowing them to stay close to their loved ones.

April 15th was the first time I had volunteered at a Ronald McDonald House, which was located near Loyola University Hospital in Hines, Illinois. There were five student volunteers from Chicago State University and Midwestern University along with two practicing pharmacists from Midwestern University/Northwestern Medicine and the University of Chicago Medicine. A variety of brunch items were prepared for the families, which included eggs, pancakes, bacon, sausage, yogurt, fruit, bagels and cream cheese, and croissants and pastries. After cooking and preparing the meal, we served it buffet style for the guests staying at the house. As guests proceeded to the kitchen, each one of them thanked us for a home cooked meal during their busy stay.

Once breakfast was served, the volunteers were given a tour of the house and it was quite incredible. The set up of the home had both purpose and meaning. The house had 18 bedrooms, and each of these bedrooms had either a queen-sized bed or two twin beds with nightstands and a closet. None of the bedrooms had a television in them because the organization believes televisions should be located in the shared family rooms. The house had two family rooms, each equipped with a television, DVD player, and gaming consoles. The living room had a cabinet filled with toys, games, puzzles and stuffed animals. Everything in the closet was donated for the children to play with and use during their stay. There was a kid's playroom on the main floor where the children could play. On the third floor, guests were able to use the beautiful chapel, which had stained glass windows signifying and supporting different religions. The top floor of the home had a computer lab that was created by an eagle scout. Lastly, we were shown the library which was filled with books for children and adults. It even contained a hidden indoor tree house with beanbags for children to sit on and read their favorite children's book.

Trying to find time to volunteer with a busy pharmacy school lifestyle can seem a bit overwhelming. However, it was an eye-opening and rewarding experience. Contributing to the community by volunteering to prepare and serve these wonderful families with a home cooked meal gives you a sense of purpose and self-worth. Knowing that I could potentially have a positive impact on someone was rewarding. I would recommend taking just a couple of hours from your free time to volunteer for such a great cause. These families are staying at the house while their children are getting the necessary medical attention they need. Preparing a meal for families during a time of stress is a great way to show support to these families during their difficult time. The guests are beyond grateful to those who have donated house items, toys, books, or their time.



ICHP volunteers: Huma Nizamuddin, Florence Garza, Milena McLaughlin, Bernice Man, Robert Korthals, Sara Lindquist, and Adam Wahab.

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