



For Immediate Release

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Children's Healing Center Expands to Southeast Michigan

Broad community support, \$2 million state of Michigan grant jumpstart capital campaign to bring Good. Clean. Fun.® to kids with weakened immune systems

Ypsilanti Township, Michigan, DATE – The Children's Healing Center will break ground on its second-ever location this spring in Ypsilanti Township, bringing the healing power of play to children and families in Southeast Michigan.

The Children's Healing Center is a first-of-its-kind year-round recreational center for children with weakened immune systems and their families that provides opportunities for play, programming, education and socialization. The first Center opened in Grand Rapids in 2015 to provide a safe, clean yet fun space for members and their families, who typically must isolate from the world to prevent from getting sick.

The new location will be on South Huron Street north of the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office and across from Brinker Way.

The expansion into Southeast Michigan has broad backing from the community, including:

- A \$2 million grant from the state of Michigan.
- A \$1.25 million matching gift from The Jones Family Foundation.
- Support from Michigan Sens. Jeff Irwin and Thomas Albert, state Rep. Felicia Brabec and former state Rep. Mary Whiteford.
- Support from the Ypsilanti Charter Township Board of Trustees, led by Supervisor Brenda Stumbo.

After an extensive quiet capital campaign, which has already raised more than \$5.2 million of the \$6.5 million needed to build the location, the Center is now entering the public phase with additional support opportunities available, including leadership gifts and general community support.

"We are beyond excited to bring the healing power of play to Southeast Michigan," CHC founder and CEO Amanda Barbour said. "It has long been our goal to expand our services to welcome more kids and families craving an opportunity for connection. Thanks to the support we've received, we can now break down the barriers of isolation to give these kids and families some good, clean, fun.

"We are extremely grateful to the state of Michigan, The Jones Family Foundation and Ypsilanti Township for understanding and supporting the value we bring to the community. Their support has been a crucial step in bringing our second location to reality. We extend a heartfelt thank you to the greater Ann Arbor community for believing in us – and in the healing power fun can bring to our members."

The Center provides extensive programming in, science, technology, education, art and math, or STEAM, fitness, culture and other disciplines at no cost for qualifying children from birth through age 26 and their families. Siblings are invited to participate in all programming, with the Center also holding regular programs designed exclusively for parents and caregivers. Qualifying families typically have a child with cancer, an autoimmune disorder, organ transplant, congenital heart defect, sickle cell or other medically complex condition that leaves them at greater risk for infection.

Factors including strong local interest, a robust philanthropic culture and access to world-class medical institutions played a key role in selecting the Ann Arbor area for the Center's first expansion.

"Since opening seven years ago, we've had several families from the Ann Arbor area make the drive to visit us in Grand Rapids," Barbour said. "This demonstrates how our philosophy and programming resonate with families who crave the opportunity to break through the isolation that so many medical diagnoses bring with them.

"The Ann Arbor area was a natural location for our expansion because, like Grand Rapids, its community embraces and celebrates philanthropy, which is critical to our mission. There are also several children's hospitals and other health care facilities nearby, including the award-winning University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. We have enjoyed a partnership for years with C.S. Mott and look forward to our continued collaboration with them, as well as expanding partnerships with other area health care providers as we create programming that meets the needs of the community."

Ypsilanti Charter Township Supervisor Brenda Stumbo added, "We are thrilled to welcome the Children's Healing Center and look forward to continue collaborating to serve children and families in our community and beyond."

The new location will be built from the ground up and designed to provide as close to a germ-free environment as possible. The 11,000-square-foot facility will have different zones, including:

- **Exploratory Play:** Space that supports exploration and play-based learning, including an educational environment for the Center's Little Tots University Preschool and areas for creativity and imagination.
- **Active Fitness:** Space that encourages kids to get moving and release energy, featuring a space to run, jump and play. It will also include flexible configurations that will allow for group games, fitness classes, yoga, sports, dance and other activities.
- **Teen & AYA:** Space for teens and young adults to call their own, designed to encourage group activities and games, build community and stimulate conversation.
- **Parent Lounge:** Space for parents to connect and share with one another, with flexible seating and a designated work area.
- **Café/Kitchen:** Kitchen space for culinary programs that foster healthy habits, as well as a coffee bar for parents and young adults and relaxation spaces for staff.
- **Art Room:** Offering a hands-on area that allows children to be messy and creative as they work on individual and group art and educational projects. The environment will be designed to encourage exploration, ideation and learning.
- **Garden:** An outdoor space offering hypoallergenic plants and play areas designed to be suitable for children of all abilities.

More than one-quarter of the Center's operating budget will be dedicated to maintaining a super-clean space, which will feature:

- Total absence of carpet, fabric or other materials that harbor germs; vinyl and other easily cleanable materials are used through the Center.

- Use of microbial-resistant surfaces amenable to frequent disinfection.
- A designated HEPA air filtration system and positive pressurization to maintain air quality.
- Use of filtered tap water along with state-of-the-art technology to ensure there is no standing water.

“We have spent years perfecting our facility and our processes to provide peace of mind to the families we serve,” said Dr. Beth Kurt, CHC medical advisor and division chief of pediatric hematology, oncology, BMT and palliative care at Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital in Grand Rapids. “Our centers bring the physical safeguards needed along with evidence-based programming that creates an environment where both kids and parents can relax, let down their guard, play and connect.

“The COVID-19 pandemic taught us all the pain of lockdown and isolation. For many of our members, there is no end in sight – the lockdowns we experienced for a few years is their life. The masking we had to do, not being able to see family and friends, not doing anything fun outside our homes – that remains the everyday reality for our families, who worry even a minor illness could lead to hospitalization or even become life-threatening to their child.

“The Center fills a critical but missing component in the health care continuum by meeting the social and emotional needs of children and families in a place that’s not a hospital – but has been built to keep them safe.”

The Children’s Healing Center is the vision of Barbour, who was diagnosed with stage 4 Hodgkin’s lymphoma just shy of turning 22. She immediately began treatment at Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital, where her budding career in architecture and her post-college social life were replaced with doctor appointments, surgeries and chemotherapy.

Unable to interact with friends and loved ones, Barbour felt isolated and lonely. During her weeks at the hospital, she met kids fighting for their lives who, like herself, were unable to enjoy the simple things in life – dinner at a restaurant, a birthday party with friends – without worrying about getting sick. Even as she struggled with her own health issues, Barbour dreamed of a place where these kids could go and just be kids.

After successfully battling her cancer, Barbour continued her career as an architect, but the seeds of the Children’s Healing Center were planted. After five years of gathering community support – and maintaining a full-time job – Barbour was able to finally launch the Center and has since led as its executive director and, more recently, CEO.

“Spending time with families who were just looking for an escape and a glimpse of hope not only inspired me, but fired me up,” Barbour said. “I wanted to provide a solution to them. Thankfully, I found a community of professionals, businesses and supporters who shared the same vision I had. We got together and built the Center. It was an incredibly collaborative process, and we are experiencing that same community strength as we enter Southeast Michigan.”

The new location will be led by Lorrie Beaumont, an accomplished leader in education with a specialty in child development. Most recently, she was chief learning officer at the Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum, where she worked at the intersection of development and education managing major community partnerships, writing grants and overseeing the vision and direction of the education programs.

The McFate Group is serving as both architect and design-build contractor, and R3design will provide interior design services and furniture selections.

The project should take approximately eight to nine months to complete before the doors officially open. More information can be found at [SE EXPANSION LANDING PAGE](#).

About Children's Healing Center

Opening its doors in September 2015, the Children's Healing Center is the first year-round recreation center in the nation for children with weak immune systems. The Center, with locations in Grand Rapids and Ypsilanti Township, offers a safe, clean and interactive place for children ages 0 to 26 to come play and socialize. For more information, visit childrenshealing.org.

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