

Marion Rattray changed everything about Roger's House with a simple question: 'Why limit the number of children?' Today, she is in charge of palliative services at the stand-alone, broad-based, eight-bed hospice she envisioned ...



After hearing that Roger's House was intended as a palliative care centre for children with terminal cancer, Marion Rattray suggested it be opened to children with any terminal disease.

A place that speaks of love, of children and community

BY RON CORBETT

It was on the radio in the summer of 2003 that Marion Ratray first heard the Ottawa Senators were going to build a hospice for children with terminal cancer.

It would be built to honour assistant coach Roger Neilson, who had died from the disease four days earlier, on June 21. The hospice would be called Roger's House. She had to hear it again, on another newscast, before believing what she had heard. She was on her way to work and, as the person in charge of palliative services at the Children's

Hospital of Eastern Ontario, the news was a surprise. She had heard nothing about it.

When she arrived at work, it was the talk of the hospital and, at some time during that day, Garry Cardiff, the hospital's CEO, asked what she thought about it.

"It's great news," she answered. "But I don't know if it can work, if it's just for children with cancer. There aren't enough of those children for a full, stand-alone hospice."

She went on to say Roger's House should be a hospice for any child with a life-limiting illness. Muscular dystrophy. Niemann Pick. Whatever genetic, metabolic or neurological

disease a child suffered from, whatever was going to cut their life short — these should not be reasons to close the door.

She wondered later that day if she had been too harsh. There was nothing wrong with wanting to help children with cancer. A noble idea. Maybe there was something, on a smaller scale, that could be done.

Of course, maybe nothing would happen at all, and this was moot. That was another thought.

The Senators had not contacted CHEO. In the grief of losing their beloved assistant coach, perhaps the hockey team had simply stated

a wish, more than a fact, something that would occur to them before long.

She went about her business, that being the care of dying children at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, and even forgot about the story.

A week later, she was summoned to the CEO's office. Inside, there was another man waiting. He introduced himself as Dave Ready, from the Ottawa Senators Foundation.

He shook the nurse's hand, and then said: "So, I hear we should be doing more."

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