

# Chez nous

MCH STAFF NEWSLETTER | SPECIAL EDITION 2026



Photos: Ryan Blau — PBL Photography, The Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation and Grégoire Laroché's family

## Honouring the winners of the 2026 Awards of Excellence

la fondation  
de l'hôpital  
de montréal  
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the montreal  
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Hôpital de Montréal  
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Montreal Children's  
Hospital  
McGill University  
Health Centre

## Extraordinary trajectories



Photo: Ryan Blau, PBL Photography

Norman E. Hébert, C.M., and Renée Vézina

The Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation Awards of Excellence celebrate people in The Children's extended family who, through their dedication and compassion, transform the daily lives of children and families. Behind each reassuring gesture, each breakthrough and each smile are men and women who choose to go above and beyond their roles.

The 2026 edition pays homage to outstanding recipients, nominated by their peers for their leadership and commitment. All of them work toward a common goal: to offer people-centered care and to make a real difference in the lives of families.

This year, two distinctions stand out for the particularly moving stories behind them. The families of Catherine "Kat" Demes and Grégoire Laroche remind us, with extraordinary generosity, that even through the most difficult moments, love can continue to change lives.

We are also celebrating P.K. Subban and his foundation's incredible commitment. Their \$10M pledge has impacted 100,000 children and families at the hospital.

To everyone honoured in these pages: thank you for demonstrating excellence and compassion with so much heart.

We'd also like to thank our invaluable sponsors: American Iron & Metal, BMO Financial Group, Broccolini, Fednav and Mavrik Corp., DGDM Family Foundation, the Mirella and Lino Saputo Foundation, GardaWorld and Pfizer. Their generosity allows us to share these inspiring stories and continue to transform the future of pediatric care.

**Renée Vézina**

President

The Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation

**Norman E. Hébert, C.M.**

Chairman, Board of Directors

The Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation

# Dr. Karl Muchantef

Recipient of the Broccolini Medical Award of Excellence



Photo: The Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation

For Dr. Karl Muchantef, Director of the Pediatric Medical Imaging Department and program director for radiology residents, radiologists are the “problem-solvers of medicine.”

When an X-ray or a scan goes up, he tries to render a diagnosis. “Sometimes you can’t be definitive, but you can give direction.”

Thanks to his work, patients at The Children’s can get more accurate and timely diagnoses, leading to more effective treatments and better outcomes. In recognition of his leadership, compassion and impact, Dr. Muchantef received the Medical Award of Excellence.

“Put the patient at the very centre of what you do,” he says, echoing advice from a respected colleague. That philosophy guides every decision he makes.

## BROCCOLINI

He sees radiology as making visible what is invisible and guiding care from behind the scenes. His practice spans pediatric diagnostic and interventional radiology, offering constant variety and challenge.

After completing medical school at Queen’s University, he did a residency and fellowship in the United States, before returning to Canada for an interventional radiology fellowship at the McGill University Health Centre.

Dr. Muchantef is passionate about his work. As a part of the team for over 12 years, he enjoys days filled with collaboration, conversation and mentorship. Having benefited from strong mentors himself, he strives to create a supportive environment for residents climbing what he calls the steep hill of training.

*“The pediatricians, the pediatric specialists and the pediatric surgeons we work with are topflight. They’re just remarkable. You feel lucky being a part of that.”*

### A WORD FROM THE SPONSOR

At Broccolini, we shape the future of our communities, guided by a people-centered vision and a commitment to excellence. That’s why we’re recognizing Dr. Karl Muchantef’s profoundly human approach, which puts the patient at the heart of every decision. Through his expertise in pediatric and interventional radiology, he contributes to precise diagnoses and treatments better targeted to young patients. Dr. Muchantef is also an inspiring mentor to the next generation of practitioners. With his clarity and generosity in sharing knowledge and finding solutions, he fosters a culture of excellence and empathy across the Hospital. It’s a great honour to present him with the Broccolini Medical Award of Excellence. Our most sincere congratulations, Dr. Muchantef!

# Soo-Lin Ng

Recipient of the Fednav – Mavrik Corp. Nursing Award of Excellence



Photo: The Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation

An assistant nurse manager since August 2024, Soo-Lin Ng has worked at The Children's for 27 years. Tenacious and determined, her high energy makes her look like she's gliding through the hospital on skates. With her unique expertise in coordinating pediatric care and services, she spends her days finding solutions for the Complex Care team and the Day Hospital.

The first to arrive each morning in the division, she makes sure each patient can access the resources they need. As assistant nurse manager, Soo-Lin's role ranges from coordinating services outside the hospital to dispensing care herself so that a colleague can take a break.

Her 11 years as a liaison nurse in Complex Care forged her determination. That's where she learned to advocate for children with complex needs to get them the services they need to improve their quality of life.

Soo-Lin was part of the initial team to mobilize Montréal's CIUSSS and CLSC networks to create a program offering complex pediatric care at home, harmonizing services for families across the island.



To her, it was the light at the end of the tunnel and it has now become a well-established model across Montréal.

*"We're always looking for community resources to offer our patients. It takes a lot of calls and meetings, all while demonstrating that they need these services. When one door closed, I would knock on another until patients received the care best suited to their needs. If I'm good at what I do, it's because I'm surrounded by an incredible team."*

Soo-Lin is a pillar of her team. She listens and brings people together, fostering a spirit of collaboration and mutual support as both a caring mentor and an experienced colleague.

Passionate and strong-willed, Soo-Lin is proud to pass on her passion and determination to her two daughters, aged 13 and 15, one of whom already dreams of working alongside her mom someday.

## A WORD FROM THE SPONSORS

Fednav, a world leader in dry bulk shipping, and Mavrik Corp., a Montreal-based firm focused on innovation and responsible investment, share a vision for excellence that guides their actions and pushes them to surpass themselves. The same spirit drives Soo-Lin Ng, an assistant nurse manager who works with young patients struggling with complex health issues, all while navigating between hospital-based care and services offered in the community. With her calm expertise, she finds solutions for her patients and her teams. She demonstrates remarkable rigour, humanity and consistency in her role as a leader and mentor. We're proud to celebrate her dedication by presenting her with the Fednav – Mavrik Corp. Nursing Award of Excellence. Our warmest congratulations, Soo-Lin!

# Alessia Persechino

Recipient of the Professional Staff Award of Excellence



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*"All youth deserve to acquire the skills, resilience and sense of hope needed to get through hard times. My goal is to leave them with concrete tools that can have a positive impact on their lives."*

Her approach emphasizes empowering young people. She notably reorganized the emergency plan that children and adolescents can use during times of crisis.

Alessia also stands out for her creativity. She has enhanced well-established tools such as the STOP method — which aims to bring a person back to the present moment to reduce stress and prevent impulsive reactions — by adding an original twist: sour chewing gum. Despite its face-scrunching taste, the technique has been a great success with young people.

Always ready for her next challenge, Alessia completed her master's in educational psychology in April 2025, all while working full time and expecting her first child.

Currently on maternity leave, Alessia was surprised to learn she was receiving an Award of Excellence. This well-earned distinction celebrates a deeply caring and empathetic woman, whose remarkable dedication and innovative approach have made a real difference in the care of young people.

Alessia Persechino, human relations agent at Le SPOT Montréal, developed her profound sense of commitment very early. At six years old, she became an older sister to triplets and grew up in a world where looking after others came naturally.

In CEGEP, she chose to study special education and an internship in pediatric psychiatry at The Children's in 2019 confirmed that her choice was the right one. It was then that she knew she could play a key role in a multidisciplinary team supporting youth in crisis.

Quickly building trusting relationships with adolescents, Alessia developed tailored care plans and led therapeutic workshops. Always striving to go further, she earned a bachelor's degree in therapeutic recreation.

In August 2024, she joined Le SPOT Montréal, a specialized centre for adolescents experiencing suicidal crisis. As a key resource for patients needing emotional regulation tools, she supports youth, coordinates follow-up with schools and CLSCs, and also assists families.

## A WORD FROM THE SPONSOR

Alessia Persechino does remarkable work with young patients going through difficult times. Driven by a sincere desire to help, she constantly strives to develop her knowledge. Through her dedication and empathy, she identifies opportunities for improvement using innovative tools that have a meaningful and positive impact on the lives of vulnerable youth and their families. It is a great honour for The Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation to present her with the Professional Staff Award of Excellence, which recognizes her exceptional dedication. Our warmest congratulations, Alessia!

# Dr. Pia Wintermark

Recipient of the Pfizer Research Award of Excellence



Dr. Pia Wintermark's work is guided by a powerful goal: giving hope to parents of newborns in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. As a medical student in Switzerland, she spent time in the neonatal intensive care unit, where she cared for a premature baby who developed a serious brain injury. Having to tell the family there was little that she could do shaped the course of her career.

Now an internationally renowned neonatologist, clinician at the Montreal Children's Hospital, scientist at the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre and a tenured professor of pediatrics at McGill University, Dr. Wintermark was recognized with an Award of Excellence for redefining what's possible in neonatal brain care.

Her work focuses on hypoxic-ischemic encephalopathy (HIE), a serious condition caused by oxygen and blood deprivation at birth. In addition to helping refine therapeutic hypothermia protocols to reduce further brain injury, she is leading research into repairing the brain after injury has occurred.



Dr. Wintermark's pioneering clinical studies testing the drug sildenafil (widely known as Viagra) as a potential brain repair therapy for babies with HIE could change global standards of care.

*"We are not only delivering cutting-edge care and advancing research, but we are doing so in an environment that genuinely prioritizes children and families. That culture is special and it is why I feel privileged to work here."*

Dr. Wintermark's colleagues say her groundbreaking work, along with her rigour, creativity, compassion and unwavering dedication to improving outcomes for vulnerable newborns, make her highly deserving of this award.

For Dr. Wintermark, it is a meaningful recognition.

"It truly takes a team to care for these babies and at The Children's, that team functions with remarkable cohesion, compassion and excellence."

## A WORD FROM THE SPONSOR

Pfizer Canada ULC is the Canadian operation of Pfizer Inc., one of the world's leading biopharmaceutical companies. We recognize the exceptional work of Dr. Pia Wintermark, an internationally renowned neonatologist and researcher-clinician, who redefines what's possible in specialized neonatal brain care. Her pioneering clinical studies and innovative research are paving the way for new global standards and bringing hope to children and families facing neonatal brain injury. We're honoured to present the Pfizer Research Award of Excellence to Dr. Pia Wintermark, whose remarkable career is an inspiration to the entire scientific community. Congratulations, Dr. Wintermark!

# Isilda Nascimento

Recipient of the GardaWorld Administrative, Clinical and Technical Support Staff Award of Excellence



Photo: The Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation

When families call The Montreal Children's Hospital Nephrology Clinic worried about their child, Isilda Nascimento is often the reassuring voice on the other end of the line. The medical secretary, who is committed to returning every call promptly and helping to prevent delays, has become an essential part of patient care.

For nearly 20 years, Isilda has gone above and beyond to keep care moving smoothly for families and ensuring patients don't fall through the cracks.

Having a child with a serious illness can be scary for families. Amid all the uncertainty their child's condition may bring, they know they can rely on Isilda to answer their calls, coordinate their care and manage the many challenges that come with chronic kidney disease. Her meticulous organization, calm demeanour and compassionate approach to patients have made a mark on her colleagues and earned her the GardaWorld Administrative, Clinical and Technical Support Staff Award of Excellence.

## GARDAWORLD

Isilda is the steady force of the nephrology team. With remarkable care and dedication, she makes sure everything runs smoothly. She manages referrals, coordinates clinic visits and follow-ups, schedules kidney biopsies and fields the many calls from families. She brings serenity and clarity to even the most difficult moments. Her presence makes a lasting difference, both for the team and for every family she supports.

*"What I love the most is being helpful. We are family and we do work very closely together."*

When she found out she was nominated for this award, Isilda says she was touched and taken aback. "I'm extremely honoured, proud and appreciative of the nomination. I sent an email to everybody to say thank you," she explains. "I see this as a win for the whole team."

### A WORD FROM THE SPONSOR

At GardaWorld, Canada's security services leader, we are always raising the bar. That same spirit also guides our desire to recognize exceptional individuals. Through her unwavering dedication and strong commitment to service, Isilda Nascimento acts as a reassuring presence in moments often filled with uncertainty. Her rigour, warmth and ability to advance care seamlessly make her an indispensable member of her team. This distinction aptly highlights the concrete and lasting impact of her work for patients and their loved ones. GardaWorld is proud to recognize Isilda Nascimento's essential and compassionate contribution by presenting her with the Administrative, Clinical and Technical Support Staff Award of Excellence. Congratulations, Isilda!

# Hemodialysis Team

Recipient of the American Iron & Metal Teamwork Award of Excellence



From l. to r.: Arvin Arenas, Catherine Giroux, Geneviève Letendre, Cynthia Dion and Breanne Laird. \*Missing from photo: Dora Persico and Nathalie Aubin.

Photo: The Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation

Imagine the patience, attention and creativity it takes to keep children and teens occupied while they sit for four to five hours at a time, three to four times per week, hooked up to a machine. Yet the seven nurses at The Children's Pediatric Dialysis and Apheresis Unit work with a number of different professionals to bring a little joy to these moments.

For young patients and their families, starting dialysis represents a major disruption to their daily lives. To address these new challenges, the nursing staff call on their clinical judgement and exercise a high degree of autonomy. Each treatment starts with a health assessment, followed by an individualized care plan. During dialysis, patients are continually monitored, with each team member looking after one or two patients at a time.

After starting in 2024, assistant nurse manager Catherine Giroux had to contend with significant staff turnover following retirements and relocations within the team. In two years, she trained four new nurses, a challenge she met by supporting these new team members and emphasizing the human touch crucial when working with families.

Because children resume their school and home lives following treatments, every effort is made to help normalize their daily routine: school support, music therapy, pet therapy, arts and crafts, and more. Families are grateful for this attentive care, provided by a devoted multidisciplinary team, which makes all the difference.



AMERICAN  
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For the nursing staff and other professionals who work with these patients on a daily basis, the connections they build with children and their families make their work more personal and rewarding.

*"The autonomy and decision-making skills the nursing staff have developed greatly facilitate teamwork. When I get held up, I know the rest of my team has things under control and that we can trust each other. There's a great spirit of collaboration and it's wonderful."*

The team is truly touched to receive the Teamwork Award of Excellence. "We give 110 per cent each day, so it's nice to be recognized," Catherine says. To her, the team's success rests on flexibility, attentiveness and a little something extra that makes all the difference: "This passionate team isn't KIDNEYing around!"

## A WORD FROM THE SPONSOR

At AIM, we are driven by a shared commitment and by a desire to have a positive and lasting impact in our community. This spirit of collaboration and mutual support is perfectly reflected in the remarkable work of the hemodialysis team at the Montreal Children's Hospital. Through an approach grounded in patience, attentiveness and creativity, the team transforms long hours of treatment into more human moments. Through their constant presence, their personalized care and their support for families, these seven nurses make all the difference in the daily lives of the children and adolescents they care for. It is with immense pride that we present the American Iron & Metal Teamwork Award of Excellence to the hemodialysis team.

# P.K. Subban

Mirella and Lino Saputo Foundation Award – Montreal Children’s Hospital Honorary Doctorate in Philanthropy



Photo: Ryan Blau, PBL Photography

As a defenceman, P.K. Subban always stood out for his charisma and electrifying style of play. And in 2015, he became the star defenceman for the families of sick kids at The Children’s by announcing that he and his foundation were going to raise \$10M. In 2026, he scored the goal of a lifetime by fulfilling the largest philanthropic commitment a Canadian athlete has ever made.

P.K.’s journey with The Children’s and The Montreal Children’s Hospital Foundation is even more inspiring when you consider the obstacles he’s faced. His departure from Montreal, following a trade, and the pandemic did nothing to hinder his determination.

Thanks to his support and that of his foundation, initiatives that tangibly transform the lives of patients and families saw the light of day: specialized equipment, support for families of children with complex needs, a program providing free books and mental health projects. Since 2015, more than 100,000 families have benefited.



The *PK’s Helping Hand* fund also supports families facing serious financial issues because of their child’s illness.

With his beaming smile, P.K. has become a true friend of The Children’s. Each of his visits leaves the same impression: kids, families and staff light up when he walks through those doors. His contagious energy, empathy and genuine care make each moment unforgettable.

*“With his unique ability to restore hope, bring joy and rally support for the cause of sick children, P.K. embodies the most compassionate side of philanthropy.” —Nadia Saputo, Owner, Groupe Hôtelier Grand Château*

It is in recognition of this remarkable commitment as a whole — his exceptional generosity, the lasting impact of his contributions and the deeply inspiring person he is — that the Montreal Children’s Hospital has awarded P.K. Subban an honorary doctorate in philanthropy, which was presented to him by the Mirella and Lino Saputo Foundation.

## A WORD FROM THE SPONSOR

Driven by our mission to listen to, guide and support organizations that turn their ideas into concrete actions, the Mirella and Lino Saputo Foundation has seen in P.K. Subban and his foundation a commitment that wholly embodies these values. Their unwavering support for sick children and their families has helped launch initiatives that bring hope and their impact is felt on the ground day after day. It is with deep conviction that we have chosen to sponsor this Award of Excellence, to recognize a contribution that, through its human and lasting impact, deeply reflects what we strive to encourage in our community.

# Grégoire Laroche

Recipient of the DGDM Family Foundation Nicolas W. Matossian Junior Community Award of Excellence



Photo: Grégoire Laroche's family

In January 2024, eight-year-old Grégoire Laroche was a boy who loved going to school. But suddenly, everything changed when he was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive form of leukemia. Throughout his battle, before, during and after his treatments, a hospital school program allowed him to keep learning, with each lesson nourishing his thirst for knowledge.

Between treatments, clinical appointments, stem cell transplants, recovery periods, relapses and a trial of an experimental medication, Grégoire poured himself into working on a story that all started with a school project: *Les mystérieux toutous*.

The project quickly grew far beyond the classroom. Fourteen Quebec illustrators contributed to it and the book was published, with most of the proceeds donated to The Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation. Then came a series of happy surprises: an



invitation to the Salon du livre de Montréal, an honorary best-seller certificate and even a dedication from Nick Suzuki. But the night before the Salon du livre opened, after nearly two years of treatment, Grégoire passed away.

*"Grégoire was an incredible kid. Supporting him through this wonderful project was a true privilege and joy," says Marie-Josée Longpré, a hospital special education teacher with the Centre de services scolaire de Montréal, who coordinated the book's publication.*

It's with great admiration that we posthumously present Grégoire Laroche with the Junior Community Award of Excellence, in honour of his creativity, resilience and determination. Thank you to the devoted teams at The Children's, whose compassionate care supported Grégoire every step of the way, as well as all those who helped his book come to life so that his memory could continue to live on.

## A WORD FROM THE SPONSOR

Thanks to the exceptional quality of care at The Children's, young patients can access resources that enable them to continue learning, creating and pursuing their dreams. A passionate student, Grégoire persevered through his illness to fulfill his dream of publishing his book. The DGDM Family Foundation supports educational initiatives that help children develop their knowledge and talents despite the obstacles, like Grégoire's remarkable journey. We are proud to posthumously present him with the DGDM Family Foundation Nicolas W. Matossian Junior Community Award of Excellence. His courage and creativity will continue to inspire children everywhere to pursue their dreams.

# Catherine “Kat” Demes Family

Recipient of the BMO Financial Group Community Leadership and Volunteer Award of Excellence



From l. to r.: Dina Bourdakos, Christopher Demes, Peter Demes and Perry Giannias, under Catherine “Kat” Demes’s picture.

Photo: Ryan Blau, PBL Photography

They say it takes a village to raise a child, but it also takes a village to turn pain into a memory that gives life meaning. That is what Catherine “Kat” Demes’s family has accomplished in the wake of a deeply distressing ordeal.

After a battle with incurable brain cancer, Kat passed away in 2015 at the age of five. Since then, her parents, Dina Bourdakos and Peter Demes, founders of the Kat D Foundation, which is dedicated to research on diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma (a type of brain tumour), and her uncle, Perry Giannias, creator of Expos Fest, have kept her memory alive. Through their efforts, they offer a glimmer of hope to children and families affected by the disease.

After raising \$1M for research, the family collected an additional \$2M for the Kat Demes Pavilion, providing free accommodations to parents living outside of Greater Montreal while their child receives specialized care at The Children’s.

*“If we don’t help kids survive, where is the world going?”  
—Dina Bourdakos, Kat’s mom*

For over a decade, a large community of friends and loved ones, nicknamed “a true village,” has mobilized to support research and,



more recently, to fund the Kat Demes Pavilion. From the very beginning, Dina knew she could help moms like her — moms experiencing an emotional roller-coaster of hope and fragile reprieves.

Inaugurated two years ago and entirely community-funded, the Pavilion offers comfort, presence and strength to families facing the unthinkable. Last year, 61 families stayed at the Pavilion and a similar number is expected this year. The average stay is approximately 25 days. Beyond the numbers are concrete gestures: Dina sometimes calls the Pavilion for news or makes an impromptu visit, her arms full of gifts.

The Montreal Children’s Hospital Foundation is honoured to present the BMO Financial Group Community Leadership and Volunteer Award of Excellence to the family of Catherine “Kat” Demes. Thanks to this profoundly grateful family and their loyal supporters, the Pavilion has become far more than a place to stay. By being there for families during their most difficult moments, it is a gesture of solidarity and humanity, keeping Kat’s memory alive.

## A WORD FROM THE SPONSOR

Kat Demes’s family is a shining example of what it means to make a lasting impact in the community. By transforming an unimaginable trial into a unifying commitment, they rallied their parents, friends and loved ones to provide comfort and support to families navigating moments of profound vulnerability. At BMO Financial Group, we believe it takes courage to take action and help build stronger communities. The Demes family’s unwavering dedication perfectly illustrates that conviction. We are proud to present them with the BMO Financial Group Community Leadership and Volunteer Award of Excellence, recognizing the enduring impact of their generosity on families at The Children’s.

# Caring for Kids RADIOTHON

August 20, 2026

At The Children's P.K. Subban Atrium (S1)  
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