

**Press Release**  
**For immediate distribution**

## **Chloé wins two-year fight against her life-threatening eating disorder**

**\$500 000 donation from Bell Let's Talk to help children with eating disorders  
get access to care as quickly as possible**

**Montréal – May 2, 2023:** Chloé\* was only seven-years old when she started to have disordered eating. At first, the symptoms were subtle; she'd leave food on her plate or skip dessert. Progressively, her eating behaviour got worse. She would nibble at her food and claim she wasn't hungry because she'd eaten too many snacks. Slowly, she was developing a full fledged-eating disorder.

During the pandemic, Chloé's eating habits took a turn for the worse. Unbeknownst to her family, Chloé, who was by then age nine, stopped eating altogether. Within three weeks, she lost eight kilograms and her weight plummeted to a mere 28 kilograms. She could barely walk.

Her family rushed her to The Montreal Children's Hospital (The Children's) Emergency Department.

### **A dramatic increase in eating disorders during the pandemic**

Eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa, are the 3<sup>rd</sup> most common chronic illnesses in adolescence after asthma and obesity. These illnesses have both psychological and physical components that can dramatically impact a child's growth, brain function, bone strength, sexual development, and cardiac health.

In 2020, The Children's Eating Disorders Program assessed 103 patients for eating disorders. In 2021, assessments jumped to 156, a 50% increase. In addition, the children were more severely ill than usual, both physically and psychologically.

### **The Children's Hospital Foundation asks Bell Let's Talk for help**

The Children's Hospital Foundation turned to **Bell Let's Talk** to help children like Chloé get access to care as quickly as possible. Bell is donating \$500,000 over five years to the Foundation so the Eating Disorders Program can hire another full-time therapist.

"Bell Let's Talk is pleased to donate \$500,000 to The Children's to support the Eating Disorders Program so more tweens and teens with eating disorders receive the lifesaving care they need as quickly as possible. This gift builds on our longstanding partnership with The Children's Hospital Foundation and is part of our commitment to improving access to mental health care in Canada," said Mary Deacon, Chair of Bell Let's Talk.

## **Chloé was seriously malnourished**

At The Children's, Chloé and her parents met Dr. Giuseppina Di Meglio, an adolescent medicine specialist and a member of the Eating Disorders Program. Chloé's condition was severe. She had lost so much weight her internal organs had no more visceral fat which caused her a lot of pain. She was just skin and bone.

The family signed up for Family Based Treatment (FBT), the leading treatment for adolescent restrictive eating disorders, which is done at home with regular hospital follow-ups. FBT focuses on helping parents take the lead in refeeding their child and normalizing their eating patterns. The goal of therapy is complete remission, which means reaching a healthy weight, resuming pubertal development, reversing medical complications, and restoring normal thought patterns and behaviours around food.

## **Two years of anguish as Chloé relearns to eat**

Magali,\* Chloé's mom, remembers sitting down at the start of FBT with her daughter for her first meal. Six hours. It took six hours of urging, cajoling, and reassuring to get her daughter to eat six pieces of tortellini. Chloé adamantly refused. She screamed, howled and cried. She lashed out physically, hitting and slapping her mom and dad. This pattern of behaviour continued day after day for quite some time at each meal and snack.

"It was a truly awful time. But I had to be relentless with Chloé. I couldn't give in. I had to make her eat. Her life was at risk," said Magali, whose own health started to suffer due to the stress of the ordeal.

## **Now eating like a normal kid**

It took two long years before Chloé overcame her eating disorder. For the past six months, Chloé, now age 11, has been doing well. She is at a healthy weight. She is smiling again and eating like a regular kid.

"Eating disorders are curable, especially if treatment starts early. However, families need to remember eating disorders are chronic illnesses that don't improve after a few visits – it takes time and effort from both the child and their family to overcome all aspects of the disorder. With the family and treating team working together, most adolescents will fully recover from their physical and behavioural symptoms," said Dr. Holy Agostino, Director of The Children's Eating Disorders Clinic.

## **Worried your child has an eating disorder?**

If you are worried your child might have an eating disorder, talk to your family doctor, who knows your child's medical history and has an established relationship. After the assessment, depending on the child and family's needs, your physician may refer you to specialized services.

Useful resources are available online or in print about family-based therapy treatment and how parents can adopt this therapeutic approach at home. Some of these are

accessible on the Eating Disorder Program [page](#) on The Montreal Children's Hospital website.

\*Chloé and Magali have asked that their real names not be used in this press release.

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## **ABOUT THE MONTREAL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL FOUNDATION**

The mission of The Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation (The Children's Foundation) is to inspire and mobilize the community to support innovation in clinical care, research and teaching at The Montreal Children's Hospital. The Children's is the pediatric teaching hospital of McGill's Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, and it supports the Child Health and Human Development Program of the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre, which, in 2022, ranked among the top three research institutes in Canada. The Foundation has launched a major campaign with a goal of \$200 million, the most ambitious fundraising objective for a pediatric hospital in Quebec's history. Funds raised will advance groundbreaking projects that will push the envelope in pediatrics on an international scale and help The Children's *Find Unexpected Ways to Heal*. Since its inception in 1973, the Foundation has raised more than \$600 million, which has helped sick children in Montreal and around the world get back on their feet and return to their mischievous ways. Because a bratty kid is a healthy kid. For more information, please visit [childrenfoundation.com](http://childrenfoundation.com).

**For more information or to interview Magali or an Eating Disorders Specialist at The Children's please contact:**

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