

# Grahamtastic Connection

## 2017 Annual Report



GRAHAMTASTIC  
CONNECTION

[www.grahamtastic.org](http://www.grahamtastic.org)





# Annual Letter from the Executive Director

## “Beyond Humbled”

I have had the opportunity to use the phrase “beyond humbled” many times in 2017 for so many reasons, not the least of which was my nomination as a CNN Hero for my work with Grahamtastic Connection.

I started this organization almost twenty years ago in honor of my son, Graham, who is my hero. I set out to help other children as they battle prolonged illness and, while this year has brought great recognition and

accolades for all that has been accomplished, the greatest achievement is helping over 1,600 children to date. These are children who stay strong through treatment and continue to reach out to family and friends while keeping on track with their education utilizing the Internet access, laptop, tablet and or robotic technology we have been able to supply.

It is never lost on me that the love, support and generosity of our donors and volunteers

enables us to continue to meet the needs of children. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, on behalf of our entire organization.

It has been an amazing year and I look forward to continuing to help children stay connected when their world would otherwise be out of reach. Please read on for more details about 2017!

*With Warmest Regards,*

*Leslie Morissette*

# About Grahamtastic Connection



Grahamtastic Connection's mission is to provide free computers, laptops, tablets, robotic technology and Internet access to children with cancer and other serious illnesses for educational purposes. This technology is virtually bringing them to the places they want to be and connecting them when their world is out of reach.

The organization was founded in 1998 by Leslie Morissette in honor of her son, Graham, who sadly lost his battle to cancer in 1997 at the age of 8. Leslie learned first-hand what it was like to spend months at a time in the hospital while her son was in cancer treatment at Maine Children's Cancer Program and Boston Children's Hospital. One of the key needs during such times, and the inspiration behind Grahamtastic Connection, is to remain connected to school, to family and to friends during extended periods of isolation. Often this

access is out of reach due to medical and financial limitations.

The program started by supporting 6 qualified children in 1998, providing them with computers and Internet access. This enabled them to continue their education while being treated and to communicate with family members and friends. Today, we are proud to have supported over 1,600 individual children receiving treatment at children's hospitals across the country. Additionally, thousands of ill children have utilized our computers placed in shared areas in hospitals, clinics and Ronald McDonald Houses.

Carolyn Wills-Barberi, Social Worker at Lafayette Family Cancer Center in Brewer, Maine observes, "Children use the devices to stay in touch with family and friends as well as participate in their classrooms. These connections are beneficial

to these patients as the connection with peers and classmates fosters hope and normalcy for these children as they undergo treatment. Teachers are able to assign enrichment activities to substitute what the child/teen may have missed in the classroom."



## Our Current Primary Activities

- Placing computers in medical facilities where they are accessible to hundreds of children.
- Providing computers equipped with webcams and Skype to individual patients for contact and interactive learning with clinics and school.
- Supplying robotic technology in patients' schools, allowing them to move around their classroom, walk up and down the school hallways, attend assemblies and field trips and interact with their teachers and peers from their hospital bed or home.
- Offering free high-speed Internet access to families with seriously ill children.
- Sponsoring our "Kids Helping Kids" Program, where high school students provide technical support to Grahamtastic Connection while learning valuable skills and the importance of helping those who are less fortunate.

## Local and National Recognition

- 2017: Top 10 CNN Hero
- 2017: December 15<sup>th</sup> Huffington Post, "5 Innovators Creating Human Connection Through Technology"
- 2017: Maine's 20 Outstanding Women, Maine's Coast 93.1 and Hannaford Supermarkets
- 2014: Town and Country Federal Credit Union "Good Neighbor Award"
- 2012: Toyota 100 Cars for Good. Winner of a Toyota Highlander
- 2011: Parent's Magazine, August issue "Power of Parents"
- 2009: John Baldacci, Maine Governor "Exemplary Service Award"
- 2008: Guest on CNBC's "The Big Idea" with Danny Deutsch
- 2006: WCSH, United Way and TD Bank's "Six Who Care Award"

## 2017 Highlights

As of December 31, 2017, Grahamtastic Connection has supported 1,606 children since the program began in 1998. In 2017, we delivered 197 pieces of technology (laptops, iPads and robots) to individual children and 24 children utilized our 18 robots throughout the year.

This year marks the 5th year that we have provided free tele-presence robots for hospitalized or homebound children. We increased our robot fleet to 18 and now 50 children have benefited from using one since our first acquisition. To our knowledge, proudly, we are the only non-profit in the country providing this service to sick children. We have three different robot brands; VGo, Double Robotics and Beam. Since we are pioneering this technology, we often receive emails, phone calls and visits from other organizations and businesses looking to learn more about our experiences with the robots. Two separate robot manufacturers, including one from Europe, visited this past year seeking to learn more about our use of this technology.

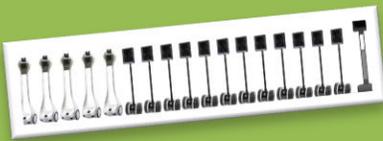
While the robots are an exciting addition, they do come with higher expenses and some operational challenges. The average robot purchase price is down from an original high of \$6,000 with a \$1,200 annual cloud fee to an average purchase price of \$3500 with a \$400 extended warranty. However, each robot still requires a new iPad or laptop to “drive” and we often need to provide funds for high-speed Internet access for the child’s home. Add on shipping costs for robots utilized beyond our local area, and you can see that the robots are a hefty investment. From an operational perspective, robotics is still a new arena and each robot brand has come with it’s own technical issue (or two!). Therefore, we face times when breakage or malfunction sidelines a robot, unfortunately. We work hard to expedite service and repairs, knowing the importance of getting the children back online so they can remotely attend class, go on field trips, participate in school concerts and stay connected with their peers.

We appreciate that Rob Caron, owner and President of Caron Engineering, has taken the role of advisor for our robotics program. He is helping us to navigate the challenges of this new technology and is on hand as we leap into 2018 with the 18 robots in our lending library. We also thank the high school students at Sanford Regional Vocational Center for the technical support that keeps our fleet "rolling."

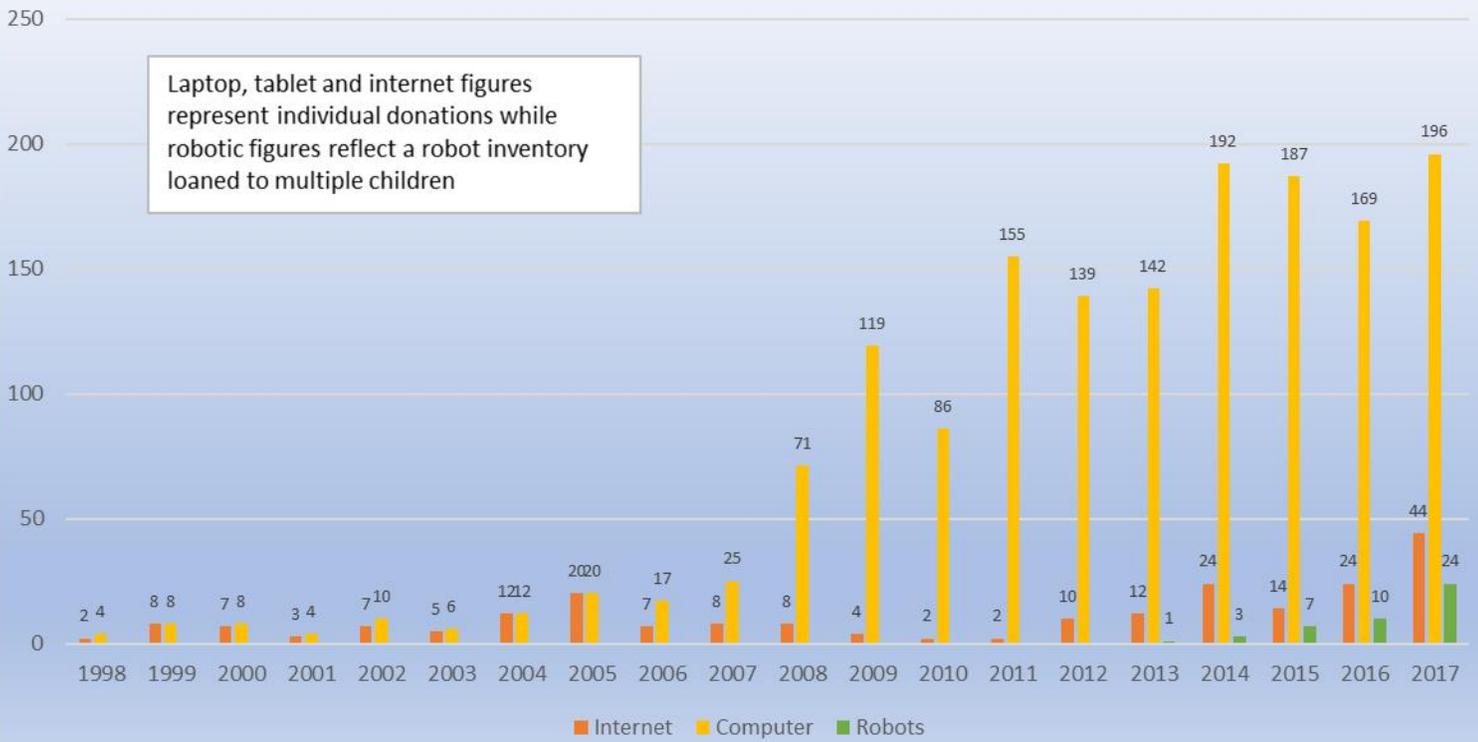
This was a tremendous year of recognition for our Founder and Executive Director, as well as a tremendous year for fundraising. Both will enable us to continue to meet the needs of children seeking technology to stay connected.



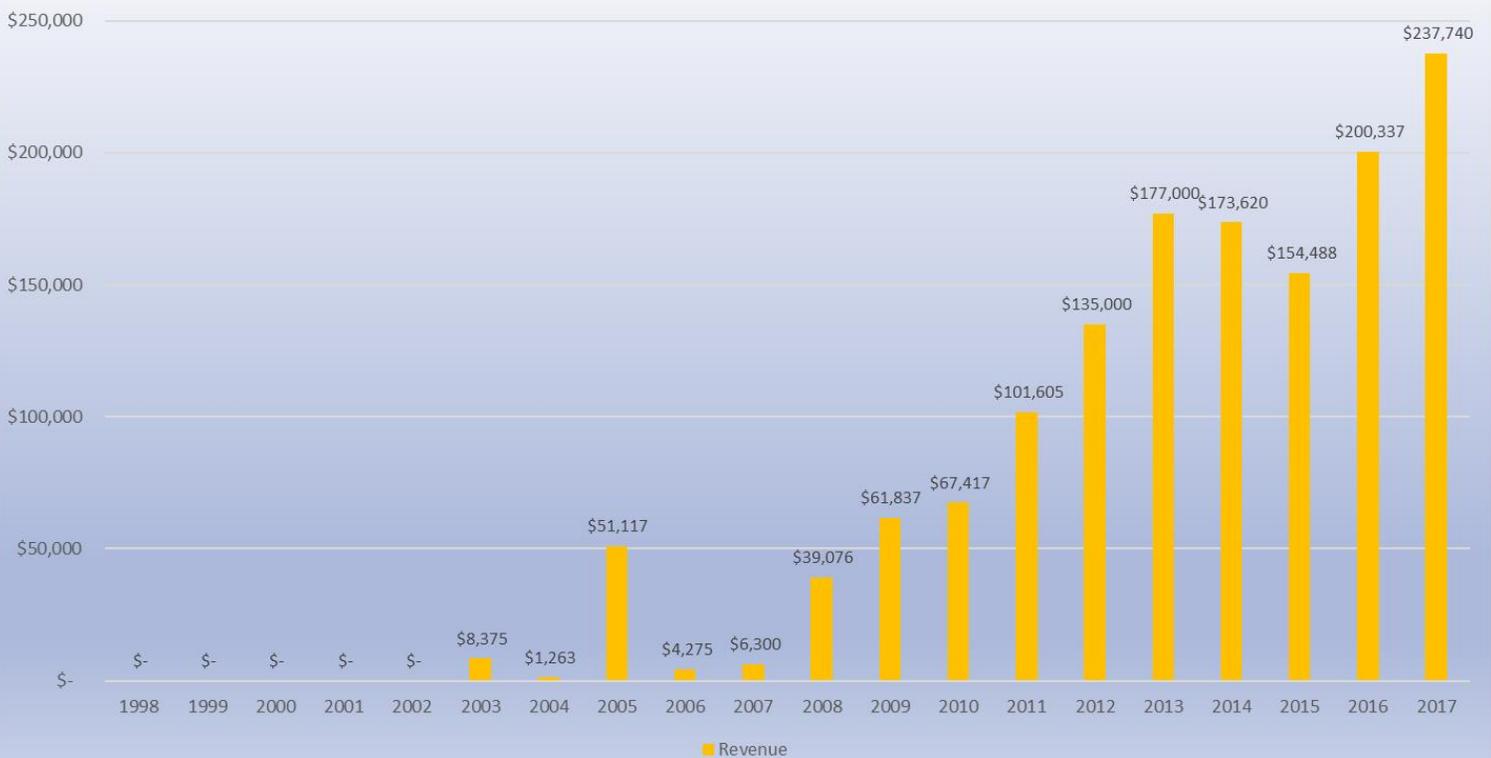
Executive Director  
Leslie Morissette,  
2017 CNN Hero



## Internet, Computer, & Robot Usage



## Revenue



2017

## Fundraising Activities



### Events Held by Grahamtastic Connection

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| March 11   | The Ninth Annual Dance & Silent Auction |
| October 22 | The Seventh Annual Run/Walk             |

### Events Held On Behalf of Grahamtastic Connection

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| January 25   | Coast 93.1 radio interview   |
| March 16-20  | CNN Hero of the Week   |
| March 26     | Irish Maple Sugar House Fundraiser   |
| April 20     | Cheers From the Heart Fundraiser   |
| April 28     | Guest Speaker for 100 Men Who Care Southern Maine                          |
| May 28       | Positively Maine Podcast with Tory Ryden                                   |
| July 4       | Robot Race with Randall's Run for the Gym, Springvale, ME                  |
| July 16      | Southern Maine ATV Club Ride for Grahamtastic Connection                   |
| July 18      | Sanford Mainers Baseball Game for Grahamtastic Connection                  |
| August 5     | Beach to Beacon 10k-Kimberly LaChance on behalf of Grahamtastic Connection |
| September 30 | Pumpkinfest Bake Sale with Town Square Realty, Sanford, ME                 |
| December 17  | CNN All Star Tribute Live on CNN   |

# Structure and Support

## Staff:

Leslie Morissette, Founder and Executive Director

## Volunteer Board of Directors:

### *Executive Committee:*

Donna Perkins, Ph.D – President, Director

Beth Brown - Vice President, Director

Shannon Troop-Smith-Secretary, Director

Roberta Macrum, CPA – Treasurer

### *Directors:*

Terri Bronder

Kimberlee Caron

Lory Chase

Lori Laurendeau

Nanci Nason

Lawrence O'Bryan

Denise Pepin

Taryn Southard

Sharlene Troop

Bruce Wooding

## Advisory Board:

Robert Caron

Daniel Cummings

Lisa Gray

Gracie Lavigne

Melody Martin-Robie

Justin Mayrand

Vanessa Nason

## Additional Volunteers:

Beauchesne Family

Morissette Family

Morrell Family

Heather Thomas (Web-design)

Maplestone School Students & Instructor

Sanford High Key Club Students

Sanford Regional Technical Center Students & Instructor

Sanford Alternative Education Students & Instructor