



## Mathéo Arseneau, 11 years old

Diagnosed with a rare form of abdominal cancer  
(rhabdomyosarcoma)

“When Mathéo got sick, the fact that we were surrounded by many other children living with cancer amplified the importance we already gave to Opération Enfant Soleil”



At age 6, Mathéo began complaining of stomach pain that increased in intensity and frequency with each passing week. One day, the violent pains and high fever that accompanied them prompted Mathéo's parents to bring their son to the Hôpital de l'Archipel in Cap-aux-Meules. Blood tests revealed that Mathéo had an infection. The doctors were concerned about the young boy's health and decided to rush him to the Centre mère-enfant Soleil at the CHU de Québec-Université Laval. “At the time, the attending physician told us that we could expect the best or the worst. But the situation was leaning toward the worst,” said Valérie, his mother.

The week that followed was punctuated by numerous exams. “We had to wait until we were in Quebec City for the X-ray results because there aren't any radiologists at the Hôpital de l'Archipel,” explained Valérie. A mass was discovered in Mathéo's abdomen. His parents were devastated by this terrible news. “The oncologist told us about the treatment plan, and we knew we'd have to leave the Islands for an indefinite period of time to be close to the hospital and have access to the on-site specialists,” recalls Valérie. The CMES at the CHU was the best place for Mathéo to receive the care he needed for his complex condition. The little family had to quickly find a place to live in Quebec City and reorganize their life — far from the comfort and support of their loved ones.

On January 6, 2020, on his 7th birthday, Mathéo underwent surgery to remove the cancerous tumour. “This is the best birthday present ever,” he told his parents. The remaining treatment included three chemotherapy sessions and seven weeks of radiation. The medical team recommended that Mathéo undergo proton therapy, a much less invasive form of radiation that can

precisely target cancer cells without damaging healthy cells. This treatment wasn't available in Canada. Therefore, Mathéo and his family had to move to a specialized facility in Philadelphia over the following months. Anxious about their financial situation and worried about leaving the country and not speaking English, Mathéo's parents mustered the courage to move the family to Philadelphia. “Because he was so young, the specialists preferred to do the treatments in the United States. It was an incredible opportunity because, despite our fears, we knew that Mathéo was lucky to be selected for this treatment and that it was the best option for him,” recalls his mother.

Mathéo responded very well to the treatments. His mom and dad bravely overcame every challenge that came their way. One fateful day, the sound of a bell rang out through the corridor of the CHU at the CMES. After 67 weeks, the bell's joyful sound marked the end of Mathéo's treatments, the end of this terrible ordeal and his return home. Today, Mathéo is doing very well and continues to travel to Quebec City every six months for medical follow-ups.

“Donations are so important for all sick children. The continuous advancements in the medical field mean that little miracles happen every day!”

Valérie Chiasson and Yves Arseneau

## Little miracles don't happen on their own...

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