

# Stu Cowan: Canadiens bring Christmas cheer to sick kids

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STU COWAN, MONTREAL GAZETTE ([HTTPS://MONTREALGAZETTE.COM/AUTHOR/STUARTCOWAN](https://montrealgazette.com/author/stuartcowan))

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Three-year-old Francesca Chevalier is all giggles as she gets a visit from Montreal Canadiens Tomas Tatar, right, and Kenny Agostino at the Montreal Children's Hospital on Wednesday, December 12, 2018. *PIERRE OBENDRAUF / MONTREAL GAZETTE*

In a perfect world, the doctors and nurses at the Montreal Children's Hospital would be the ones

earning millions of dollars for the work they do saving lives, not hockey players for putting a puck in a net.

But that's not the case.

On Wednesday, the two worlds got together for the Canadiens (<https://domain.com/tag/montreal-canadiens>), annual Christmas visit to the hospital. The Canadiens players — in team tradition that goes back more than 50 years — bring gifts, spend time with the kids and put smiles on their faces, as well as those of the parents and hospital staff.

More important, the Canadiens and the cameras that follow them shine a light on the work the people at the Montreal Children's Hospital do year-round.

"It's something that's cool for us to do," the Canadiens' Jonathan Drouin said. "It's my second year doing it with the Habs. It's touching as well. Yes, we put smiles, but sometimes you walk in the rooms and the situations are hard. But we're here for a couple of hours. It's easy for us to come in and put smiles, and sometimes you walk in and they're jumping, they're so happy to see you."



Montreal Canadiens Tomas Tatar, left, and Jonathan Drouin sign autographs for 14-year-old Nicolas Boyer during the Habs' visit at the Montreal Children's Hospital on Wednesday, December 12, 2018. *PIERRE OBENDRAUF / MONTREAL GAZETTE*

One of those jumping kids was three-year-old Francesca Chevalier, who did a reverse trick and put a big smile on the Canadiens' faces when she did a little dance for them after Kenny Agostino helped her make a Christmas brownie.

"I don't have kids, but I love kids," Agostino said. "She was just so cute. That stuff was easy. I had a lot of fun with her."

Added teammate Tomas Tatar: "When you walk in and the kids smile, it's just something you can't buy. It's priceless."



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[#Habs](#) players Jonathan Drouin, Kenny Agostino and Tomas Tatar making brownies with kids at Montreal Children's Hospital [#HabsIO](#)

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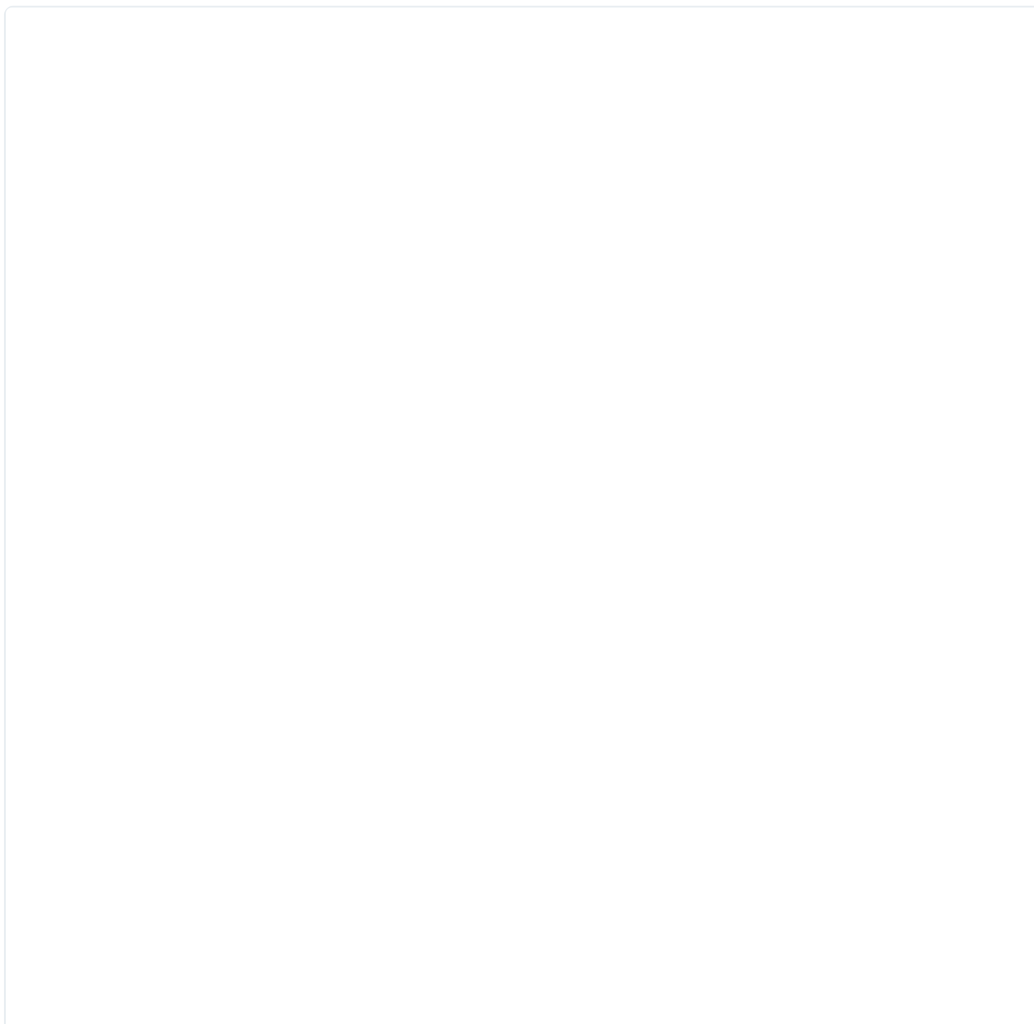
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Francesca's mother, Adriana Klapka, was impressed by the Canadiens — and not because they're hockey players.

“I didn’t think they could actually do the kiddie thing, and they did quite a good job,” Klapka said. “It’s not easy to interact with kids.”

Francesca was brought to the emergency room after she hadn’t been able to urinate for an extended period of time, and was admitted to the hospital a week ago for treatment and tests. She was going home Wednesday with her mother and grandmother, shortly after the Canadiens left the hospital, with a six-month maintenance program to follow. Francesca will be home for Christmas.

Sadly, the same can’t be said for six-year-old Anthony Sheinart, who has acute lymphoblastic leukemia ([http://www.llscanada.org/leukemia/acute-lymphoblastic-leukemia?gclid=Cj0KCQiAgMPgBRDDARIsAOh3uyJgZdNem45jqSMWAR1vDcB4IG4zHHLQxm8OLmDCvdpjsit1aED7KNsaAtOVEALw\\_wcB](http://www.llscanada.org/leukemia/acute-lymphoblastic-leukemia?gclid=Cj0KCQiAgMPgBRDDARIsAOh3uyJgZdNem45jqSMWAR1vDcB4IG4zHHLQxm8OLmDCvdpjsit1aED7KNsaAtOVEALw_wcB)). His mother, Pina Longobardi, said he had been doing well for about a year and a half before getting a fever in late October that turned into acute flaccid myelitis (<https://www.cdc.gov/acute-flaccid-myelitis/index.html>). He spent 12 days in the intensive-care unit and his legs are now paralyzed.



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[#Habs](#) Kenny Agostino doesn't have any kids himself but he's a natural at Montreal Children's Hospital [#HabsIO](#)

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"The leukemia is under control with another year of maintenance," Anthony's mother said, adding that her son was "a very active little boy" who loves soccer and is starting to get into hockey. As her voice started to crack, Longobardi said: "The paralysis is up in the air."

Longobardi had high praise for the hospital staff.

"They've been unbelievable," she said. "The staff here is out of this world. They treat him like their own son, practically. We have a lot of support from Leucan because of his leukemia. They have all kinds of activities. He has school every day ... a teacher comes in the room for an hour every day from the English Montreal School Board. He has a massage three times a week from Leucan. He has pet therapy once a week where he visits a little dog that comes to the hospital."



Unlike Francesca, Anthony will be spending Christmas at the hospital. Francesca's mother said her little girl was leaving the hospital with about 20 new friends — all staff members.

"She became really good friends with the child life director, Judy (Edes)," Klapka said. Edes "has been amazing in the last few days to make her experience a little more pleasurable, so that when she leaves the hospital she has a good feeling about where she was and doesn't leave with any bad thoughts."

Klapka decided to wait a few hours before taking Francesca home, after learning the Canadiens would be visiting the hospital.

"Everybody follows the Canadiens in the city, and who would pass up this opportunity?" Klapka said. "When a kid gets to do special things like this, I think it just gives them a sense of feeling like they're part of society, and that no matter who you are or what you do, we're all just the same regular, ordinary people with the same problems and the same hopes and wishes, especially during Christmas and the holiday season."

For the Canadiens players, this was a day to forget about hockey and [a 7-1 loss to the Minnesota Wild](https://montrealgazette.com/sports/hockey/nhl/hockey-inside-out/in-the-habs-room-unacceptable-performance-against-wild) (https://montrealgazette.com/sports/hockey/nhl/hockey-inside-out/in-the-habs-room-unacceptable-performance-against-wild) the night before and bring some holiday cheer to people who can really use it.

"We play a sport," Drouin said. "It's a little different when you come to a hospital. It's not a game."

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