

Pediatric Diabetes, COVID-19 and Artificial Intelligence: IBM Watson supports families during pandemic shutdown

IBM Canada ProBono volunteer program delivers a virtual agent using Watson Assistant for Quebec's Diabetic Children Foundation

Montreal QC – IBM Canada is working with Quebec's Diabetic Children's Foundation (known as '[Fred](#)') to support children living with diabetes in the midst of COVID-19. Delivered by nine volunteers through IBM's ProBono initiative, the AI-powered virtual assistant is available in Quebec and across Canada 24 hours per day in both French and English to answer questions related to diabetes care, parent support, school concerns, and issues pertaining to COVID-19. Since its launch on July 27th, Fred has been engaged more than 5000 times through [Watson Assistant](#).

The IBM ProBono volunteer program has been developed out of Canada as part of the Corporate Social Responsibility function, and is now being considered for adoption globally. The initiative empowers IBM employees to dedicate time and resources to non-profit organizations like Fred.

As a non-profit, Fred has provided services mostly through in-person interactions since it opened in 1974, delivering teaching and information programs, support and family connection groups, and a dedicated summer camp for diabetic children and teens. To maintain a budget that supports these activities, Fred also focuses a great deal of effort on fundraising events.

"Unfortunately, like many other organizations in Canada, COVID-19 has put the survival of Fred in jeopardy," said Claire Rousse, General Director of the Diabetic Children Foundation. "We could no longer provide the resources families living with diabetes need, which has caused even greater concern as children and parents now need more support than ever."

Alexandra Guy, a business development leader at the IBM [Client Innovation Centre](#) in Montreal, has a daughter who was diagnosed with diabetes at the age of 10 and has depended on the support through Fred for the past four years. "I know personally how important this organization is for families and so engaging the IBM ProBono program seemed like the right thing to do. Our team came together very quickly to make this happen, which makes me incredibly proud." The IBM team is also exploring ways to use the technology for fundraising efforts by the foundation.

Hadhba Sahbani, mother to five-year old Haroun, has used the virtual assistant several times. "This tool is simply amazing," she said. "Because I work all day, I can't look for information until I'm back home which is often too late. With the Virtual Assistant, I can get my answer right away. It helps me so much."

"The IBM team did an exceptional job throughout the process, completing this project for us under extraordinary circumstances," said Mrs. Rousse. "The result is beyond our expectations and now, with the support of IBM, the ProBono program, and Watson Assistant, I feel reassured we can continue to support our families living with pediatric diabetes."

For more information about Quebec's Diabetic Children Foundation ('Fred'), visit: <https://www.diabetes-children.ca/en>

For more information about IBM Canada, visit: <https://www.ibm.com/ca-en>

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