





Rotary

Innovative

Caring

Journey

Family-Centred

Rewarding

Children

Donors

& Youth

Inspiring

Impact

Professional

Family

Inclusion

Life-Changing

Community Partners

Belonging

Loving

Dedicated

Future

Accountability



en  
uth  
milies  
ners  
Supportive  
Independence

Dedicated

Abilities

Respect

Barrier-Free

Nurturing

Excellence

Volunteers

Investment

Knowledge

Mission

Mentoring

Vision

Values

Invaluable

Staff

Miracles

Possibilities

Collaboration

Friendship

Potential

Funders





# Potential

In 1957, our community celebrated the beginning of a brighter future for children and youth with special needs as the doors opened for the first time at the K-W Rotary Children's Centre.

The journey to this moment began in the 20's when local Rotarians first made the decision to dedicate themselves to serving children with special needs. During those formative years between 1922 to 1957 Rotary Club members organized medical clinics, transported children to Toronto hospitals when they couldn't be seen locally, and fundraised to buy equipment and pay for medical services. Rotarians knew that a local and permanent facility was needed for this growing community. As a result, the North Waterloo Society for Crippled Children was formed to oversee the formation and operations of what was to become KidsAbility. Our foundation that was laid back in 1957 by Rotary has provided local children and youth with special needs and their families the support and services that they need to live richer, fuller and more inclusive lives.

In the beginning, KidsAbility was focused on children with physical disabilities – our School was known as the Kitchener Cerebral Palsy School Board! As our community grew and the needs of children evolved, so too did KidsAbility. Over time, we added sites and two classrooms in Cambridge, as well as sites in Guelph, Fergus and Waterloo. KidsAbility's services were broadened to meet the needs of our families, offering a variety of services such as social work, autism services, family support groups, augmentative communication, feeding clinics, therapeutic recreation, sibling support and developmental pediatrics to better meet the complex needs of our children and youth.

In the 90's, KidsAbility saw an increase in the number of children waiting for services. Knowing that the need would only grow, a decision was made to establish KidsAbility Foundation whose focus would be on raising much-needed funds and awareness to enable KidsAbility to see as many children as possible. Last year, over \$1.8 million was raised through the incredible support of our

local donors and Foundation team. These funds enabled KidsAbility to continue to attract top talent, provide innovative programs and specialized equipment and technology.

When we look back on six decades of service to our community, we think of the many stories made possible through the continued partnership of KidsAbility, KidsAbility Foundation and KidsAbility School Authority. We remain forever grateful for the support of Rotary, our staff, volunteers, community partners, funders and donors that have empowered approximately 60,000 children and youth with special needs to realize their full potential. As we look to the future we ask: What will the next 60 years bring?

We will continue to grow, innovate and realize our own potential so that we can continue to help those we serve reach their own.



**Mardi Witzel**

Chair - KidsAbility Foundation

**Bonnie Bremner**

Chair - KidsAbility School Authority

**Tim Adams**

Chair - KidsAbility



# Realized.

KidsAbility Centre for Child Development



Charter Directors  
North Waterloo  
Society for  
Crippled Children



Dr. D. L. A. Bastedo



R. E. Brown



R. M. Buie



W. Hatch



H. P. Hawkins



Dr. S. J. Hawkins



M. C. Hay



M. H. Hudspeth



J. A. Martin



W. A. Martin



A. M. Snider



C. N. Weber

## KidsAbility Chairs

|           |                            |
|-----------|----------------------------|
| 1958–1959 | A. M. (Albert) Wilson      |
| 1960–1961 | Dr. D. M. (Dave) Bean      |
| 1962–1963 | Dr. D. G. (Glenn) McFadden |
| 1964–1965 | W. D. (Bill) Meikle        |
| 1966–1967 | T. A. (Ted) Witzel         |
| 1968–1969 | D. T. (Denny) Meyer        |
| 1970      | C. F. (Carl) Ritz          |
| 1970–1971 | W. H. (Bill) Miller        |
| 1972–1973 | E. H. (Eric) Hymmen        |
| 1974–1975 | R. H. (Bob) Pugsley        |
| 1976–1978 | J. G. (John) Martin        |
| 1978–1980 | F. C. B. Hall              |
| 1980–1981 | J. G. Machan               |
| 1981–1982 | T. R. Williams             |
| 1982–1983 | J. D. Sim                  |
| 1983–1984 | J. P. Duffy                |
| 1984–1985 | C. Pypers                  |
| 1985–1986 | A. Price                   |
| 1986–1987 | D. Schackleton             |
| 1987–1989 | J. Kent                    |
| 1989–1991 | R. Millard                 |
| 1991–1993 | J. Lynch                   |
| 1993–1995 | N. McKee                   |
| 1995–1997 | H. R. C. Pedlar            |
| 1997–1999 | Stephen Cameron            |
| 1999–2001 | L. O'Dell                  |
| 2001–2003 | Robert J. Blowes           |
| 2003–2005 | Mary Anne Witzel           |

|              |                |
|--------------|----------------|
| 2005–2007    | Alex Brown     |
| 2007–2009    | Gary Pooley    |
| 2009–2011    | Louise Leonard |
| 2011–2013    | Terry Wilson   |
| 2013–2016    | Penny Smiley   |
| 2016–Present | Tim Adams      |

## KidsAbility Medical Directors

|           |                    |
|-----------|--------------------|
| 1958–1975 | Dr. D. G. McFadden |
| 1975–1988 | Dr. W. J. Whaley   |
| 1988–2011 | Dr. J. Speight     |

## KidsAbility Foundation Chairs

|              |                |
|--------------|----------------|
| 1990–1995    | John Martin    |
| 1995–2002    | John Lynch     |
| 2002–2006    | Elaine Ormston |
| 2006–2008    | Bryan Stewart  |
| 2008–2010    | Sue Hallman    |
| 2010–2012    | Douglas Letson |
| 2012–2014    | Ray Pedersen   |
| 2014–2016    | Rob Way        |
| 2016–Present | Mardi Witzel   |

## KidsAbility School Authority Chairs

|           |                     |
|-----------|---------------------|
| 1955–1956 | Morris Hay          |
| 1956–1957 | Bruce Weber         |
| 1957–1958 | Walter Hirschberger |
| 1958–1959 | Bruce Weber         |
| 1959–1960 | S. J. Hawkins       |

|              |                     |
|--------------|---------------------|
| 1960–1961    | Walter Hirschberger |
| 1961–1962    | Bruce Weber         |
| 1962–1963    | S.J. Hawkins        |
| 1963–1964    | Walter Hirschberger |
| 1964–1965    | Bruce Weber         |
| 1965–1966    | S. J. Hawkins       |
| 1966–1967    | Walter Hirschberger |
| 1967–1968    | Bruce Weber         |
| 1968–1971    | R.H. Pugsley        |
| 1971–1974    | William Jeffery     |
| 1974–1976    | Oliver Wright       |
| 1976–1979    | Bruce Weber         |
| 1979–1981    | Gerry Blundell      |
| 1981–1982    | Bruce Weber         |
| 1982–1983    | George Starke       |
| 1983–1985    | Robert F. Bornhold  |
| 1985–1987    | Kenneth H. Plug     |
| 1987–1990    | John Chiarelli      |
| 1990–1992    | Valarie Hoag        |
| 1992–1994    | Linda Hendry        |
| 1994–1996    | Ted Conlin          |
| 1996–2000    | Doug Rose           |
| 2000–2002    | Ric Donau           |
| 2002–2007    | Walter Gowing       |
| 2007–2009    | Sharon McMorran     |
| 2009–2013    | Justin Heimpel      |
| 2013–2014    | Pat Cunningham      |
| 2014–2016    | Cynthia Davis       |
| 2016–Present | Bonnie Bremner      |



# 1950's

**1952**

The Mobile Cerebral Palsy Clinic comes to Kitchener-Waterloo and introduces the benefits of therapy for children with cerebral palsy. Rotarians ask the question: How can we provide this service locally?

**1954**

A therapist is hired and treatment takes place at K-W Hospital. The following year, Howard Hawkins calls for a permanent building to house a treatment centre and facilities that could provide local children with physiotherapy and occupational therapy.

**1955**

The Rotary Club of Kitchener-Waterloo forms the North Waterloo Society for Crippled Children as an incorporated body in September 1955. The founding members of this new society are: Dr. Don Bastedo, Roy Brown, Russell Buie, Walter Hatch, Howard Hawkins, Dr. Stonewall Jackson Hawkins, Morris Hay, Miles Hudspeth, John Martin, Wilson Martin, Arthur Snider and Carl Weber.

Known as the Kitchener Cerebral Palsy School Board, it begins the school year with just six students located inside K-W Hospital.

**1957**

Property is purchased at 828 King Street West in Kitchener for \$25,000 that will host a custom-built facility to provide local children with therapy, eliminating the need to travel to Toronto for regular appointments. The centre is designed by local Rotarian and architect Carl Rieder and built by Dunker Construction for \$106,000. The cornerstone is laid by the Lieutenant-Governor, Louis Breithaupt, and Clay Hall, President of the Rotary Club of Kitchener-Waterloo.

**1958**

March 24 the K-W Rotary Children's Centre celebrates its grand opening in Kitchener. Dr. Glenn McFadden serves as the first medical director, Norah Barrett the first head therapist and Roy Brown the first administrator.



Construction is underway on the custom-built K-W Rotary Children's Centre on King Street in Kitchener.



Lieutenant-Governor Louis Breithaupt and Clay Hall, President of the Rotary Club of Kitchener-Waterloo, lay the cornerstone on the new building.



# 1960's

As the region grows, the K-W Rotary Children's Centre expands to serve children from Cambridge and Guelph in addition to Kitchener and Waterloo. Services are extended to children with communication challenges and other disorders.

## 1963

The first addition is built to the Centre that includes two school classrooms and a therapy pool. Ted Witzel spearheads the fundraising drive to make the addition that cost \$110,000 possible.

## 1968

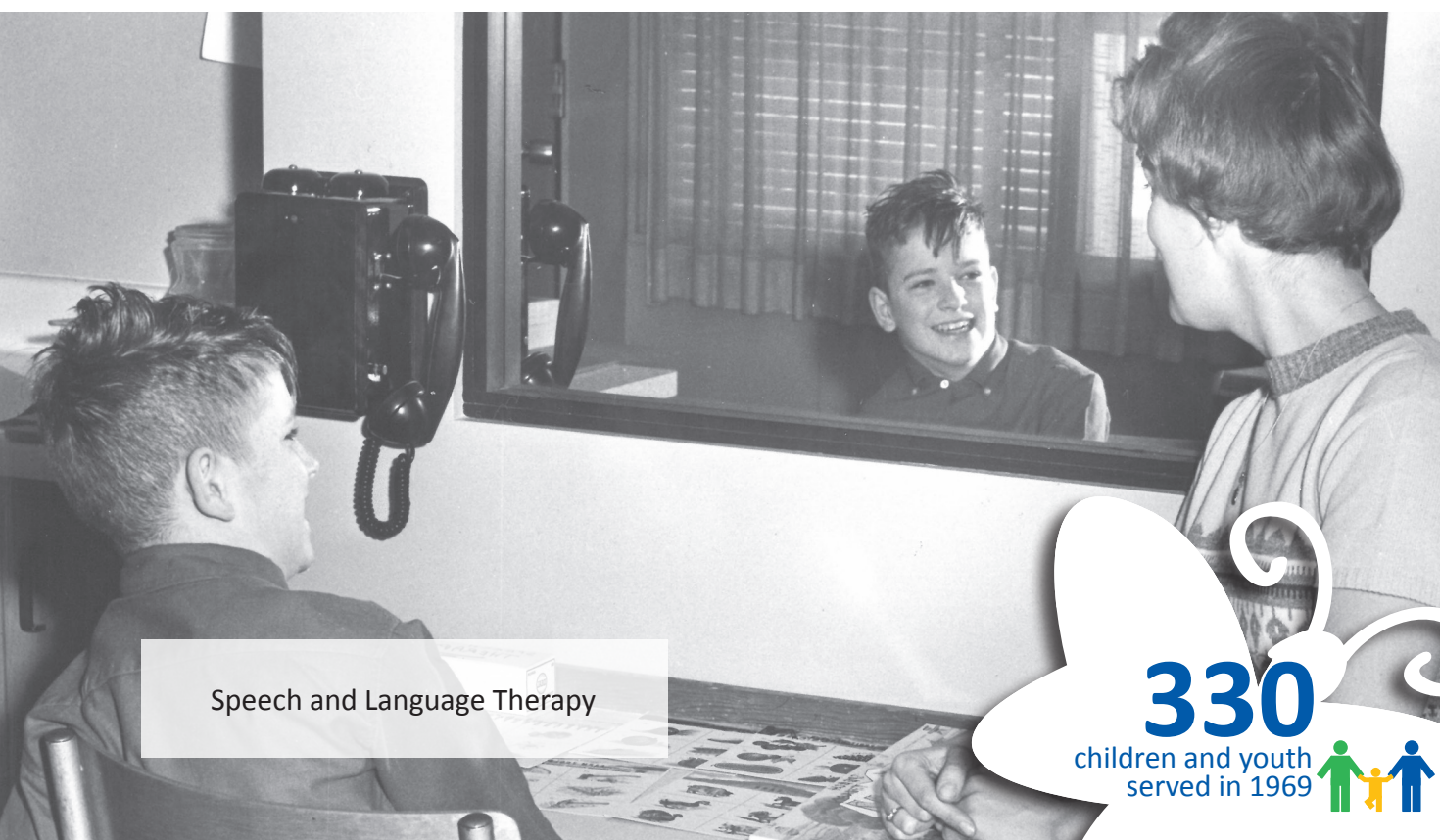
It is evident that the Centre has to expand again to meet the needs of the community. Plans are made to add a large classroom, four speech therapy offices and a library/meeting room. Again, Ted Witzel leads the fundraising campaign with a goal of \$125,000.



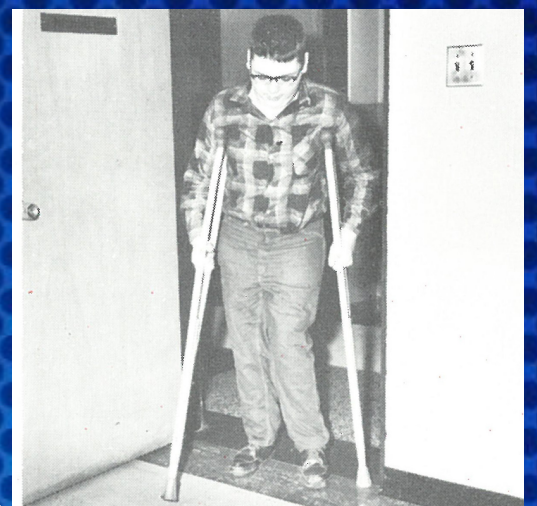
Carol Telford, physiotherapist, and Dr. Ross McTavish assess a young boy.



Orthopedic surgeons attend weekly clinics held at the Centre.



Speech and Language Therapy





# The Spirit of Volunteerism

Looking back, it was a momentous occasion – even if the members of the newly formed Kitchener-Waterloo Rotary Club didn't realize it.

The year was 1922 and the club had just heard a proposal from Alec Martin to help children with special needs. As one of the founding members of the Ontario Society for Crippled Children, Alec was concerned about their welfare. On December 18, the club formally agreed that they would “make the care and treatment of crippled children its major activity of service.”

A Crippled Children's Committee was created with Alec as the first chairman. Clinics were established at local hospitals and services were provided. As for Alec, he was the driving force on the committee for six years before he relinquished his role.

The Martin family's involvement with children with special needs didn't end there. In 1977, Alec's son John became the president of the Kitchener-Waterloo Rotary Club – and the president of the K-W Rotary Children's Centre (a facility that was constructed back in 1957 due to the ever-expanding needs of the community). When a decision was made to create a Foundation to focus exclusively on raising funds for the Centre, John became its first president in 1990 and remained at the helm until 1995.

Inspired by their father, John, and grandfather Alec, brothers David and Jamie Martin volunteered their services to help children in need. David joined the KidsAbility Foundation Board in 2000. He quickly became the Investment Chair and made a significant contribution to the sound financial practices of the Foundation until he stepped down in 2007. Jamie became a member of the Kitchener Rotary Club and served on the Regional Easter Seals Committee for over a decade.

For the Martins, supporting the community was a way of life and something they embraced wholeheartedly. “The very concept of giving back to our community was very important to us,” explains David. “In fact, volunteerism was something that was nurtured throughout our family.”

Fortunately for KidsAbility, the spirit of volunteerism ran deep through three generations of the Martin family – without whom there might not be a KidsAbility today!



*Martin* Family

---

Rotarians, Donors and Volunteers



# A Special Man

Back in 1947, the Rotary Club of Kitchener-Waterloo was looking for a few good men to join their ranks. Fortunately for their members – and KidsAbility – they came across a gentleman named Roy Brown, who would have a significant impact on both organizations.

For years, Roy had admired the work of Rotary and was interested in helping children. When he was asked to join Rotary, he leapt at the chance and was immediately assigned to the Crippled Children's Committee. Eventually, he became the Executive Director at the K-W Rotary Children's Centre (the precursor to KidsAbility) — a position he held with pride for 10 years. As he noted, "I wanted others to see the children with the same needs, hopes and aspirations of anyone else."

During his tenure at the facility, Roy was instrumental in hiring the first speech therapist in the region, implementing a life skills program for older children, integrating children into community schools — and much more.

As was his way, Roy refused to take credit for any of the accomplishments of the K-W Rotary Children's Centre: "I've seen so many miracles happen here at the centre...children achieving new goals...it may be walking with the use of a walker or crutches or propelling a wheelchair. I've had little to do with it, but I'll take the memories along with me."

When it came time for Roy to retire in 1980, he received accolades from all quarters. Yet perhaps the most endearing came from one of the young children: "Mr. Brown, I am going to miss you. You are very special to me."

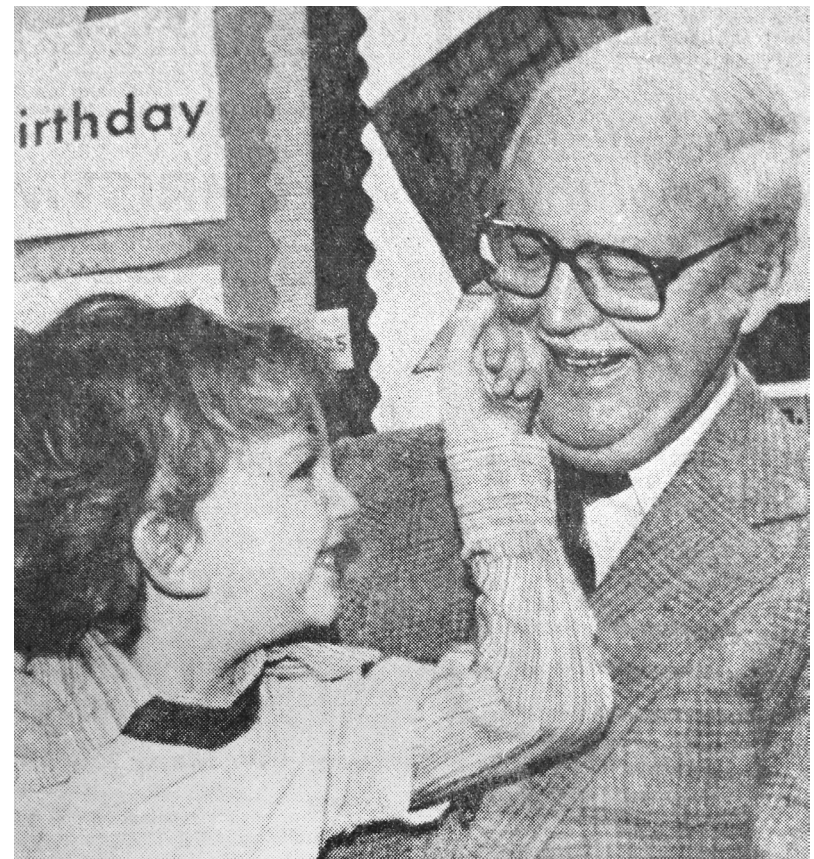
To continue the legacy left by Roy, an endowment fund was established in his name to support staff education.

On January 22, 2007, Roy Brown passed away peacefully after a long life dedicated to serving KidsAbility and children with special needs. On that day, everyone at KidsAbility echoed the sentiment of that young boy so many years ago: "Mr. Brown, we are going to miss you." And to this day, we still do.

---

“ I've seen so many miracles happen here at the centre...children achieving new goals... ”

---



*Roy* Brown

---

Executive Director -  
The K-W Rotary Children's Centre  
1970–1980

# Full Circle

It's hard to imagine what our community would be like without KidsAbility. After all, the organization seems to be intricately woven into the very fabric of Waterloo Region and Wellington County. For many of KidsAbility's founders, supporting the organization became part of their rich heritage, with generations of descendants having a distinct impact. Such was the case with the Webers.

The family's involvement with KidsAbility can be traced back to Carl Weber — an individual who espoused the value of giving back to the community in which you work and live. A charter member of the K-W Rotary Children's Centre (which opened in 1957), Carl was instrumental in obtaining vital donations to construct the original facility in downtown Kitchener and to hire much-needed physicians and support staff.

Once KidsAbility was solidly entrenched in the community, Carl's son Jack took the leadership reins and proved to be a visionary. Recognizing that the existing site on King Street would be outgrown, he was instrumental in exchanging that property for nine acres of farmland at the edge of Waterloo. While some may have questioned this decision, his foresight — and extensive fundraising efforts alongside his good friend Bob Collins-Wright — allowed KidsAbility to build its ground-breaking facility on Hallmark Drive.

The legacy continued with Jack's daughter, Wendy, who chaired the committee for the Sugar Plum Tea (a successful fundraiser at Langdon Hall) for a number of years and volunteered at Radiothons. Wendy and her husband, Jamie, also had a very personal connection to KidsAbility. At an early age, their son, Aaron, struggled with speech before one of his teachers and KidsAbility staff discovered he had hearing problems. Once the hearing issue was addressed, speech therapy helped Aaron to thrive at school.

A memorable moment for Wendy and Jamie occurred when their daughter, Dayna, took a position at KidsAbility. As Wendy notes, "Things came around full circle and I know everyone in the family was so proud!"

Today, the Weber legacy seems to be in good hands. Matteo and Noelle (Dayna and her husband Nico's children) have volunteered their time at Oh Christmas Free, Sugar Plum Tea and other KidsAbility initiatives.

Looking back, a common thread that weaves itself throughout KidsAbility's 60-year history is the support of the Webers. In fact, it's not a stretch to say that their sheer determination, extraordinary vision and ongoing support helped to give more than 60,000 children with special needs — the number of clients that have graced our halls over the years — the opportunity to realize their full potential.



*Weber* Family

---

Rotarians, Donors and Volunteers



# A Proud Family Tradition

Rotarians have a long history of helping children with special needs in Kitchener-Waterloo. Back in the 1950's, club members raised funds for equipment, medical services and the opening of the K-W Rotary Children's Centre in 1957.

Ted and Mary Witzel, proud Rotarian and Rotary Ann, held numerous dinner parties for members of the community. "At one memorable gathering, my parents set the table and put a blank cheque under each plate," states their daughter, Mary Anne. "When their friends arrived, they sat down for an elegant dinner. At the appropriate time, probably after a few drinks, Dad asked that the guests look under their plates — and then write a cheque in support of the K-W Rotary Children's Centre. At the end of the night, my parents matched the gifts."

The Witzel family's involvement with the K-W Rotary Children's Centre continued as Ted (Theodore Andrew) eventually became president of the Rotary Club of Kitchener-Waterloo and chair of the Waterloo Society for Crippled Children Board (which ran the Centre). Following in their father Ted's footsteps, Tim became president of the Rotary Club of Kitchener-Conestoga and Mag Sellner and Lauri Witzel volunteered at various fundraising events. As for Mary Anne, she eventually joined the KidsAbility Board of Directors and became the president.

This rich heritage of support continued as Mardi Witzel, wife of Terry Witzel (the youngest son of Ted and Mary), became Chair of the Foundation Board in June 2016. Then three of Terry and Mardi's children took up the torch. They volunteered at KidsAbility and came to realize the importance of "giving kids a good start in life and meeting the needs of families in the community."

To recognize the family's long-standing volunteer and financial support, KidsAbility named the TA Conference Room at the Waterloo site in honour of Theodore Adam Witzel (a founding member of the Rotary Club of Kitchener-Waterloo) and Theodore Andrew Witzel.

After all, the Witzels created a legacy of giving — passed down from generation to generation — which has helped shape the organization as it stands today.



*Witzel* Family

Rotarians, Donors and Volunteers

# Innovating Education

Special education at KidsAbility School is at its finest today thanks in part to the advocacy, innovation and leadership Grace Skanes brought to the K-W Rotary Children's Centre between 1963 and 1995.

Grace saw an ad in the K-W Record for the need of a second teacher for the K-W Rotary Children's Centre and answered the call. She loved every minute working at the Centre. "We had the unique opportunity to provide exceptional service, working as a team for the children, parents and other professionals, not available anywhere in the community," says Grace. Even in retirement, Grace continued to give tours of the Waterloo site for about five years; she wanted to show as many people as possible what an amazing place the K-W Rotary Children's Centre was.

"I was most proud of the excellent rapport we had with The Waterloo County and Catholic School Boards," says Grace, who helped develop a process for transitioning the students at the Rotary Centre to their home schools. "It was very important to have a process that was second to none," she adds. When Grace started teaching at the Centre, there were just two classrooms; it only grew from there.

"Our school was honoured by a visit by Dr. Charles Bliss from Australia," remarks Grace. Dr. Bliss had developed a symbolic language called "Bliss Symbolics" that treatment Centre schools had begun using to help non-verbal children communicate. He also developed a handbook to help teachers use this system.

Over several years and with much support from Dr. Burton Borthwick, Principal of the Toronto Children's Centre and the Council for Exceptional Children, the treatment centres were able to sponsor two major conferences on special education. Both were great successes.

Grace was honoured with both the Award of Excellence in Special Education from the Council for Exceptional Children, and from The Waterloo County Board of Education with the Paul Evans Award for Exceptional Service to Exceptional Children.

Next time you pass by the portrait of Grace Skanes at KidsAbility's Waterloo site, silently thank her for everything she did to ensure special education was top notch for children with special needs at KidsAbility.



*Grace Skanes*

---

Principal -  
KidsAbility School Authority  
1963–1995



# A Part of Their Lives

*P*enny MacVicar has been a part of the fabric that is KidsAbility for 50 years. First and foremost, Penny was a parent of a child with cerebral palsy — her son, Bruce.

In 1969 when he was just 15 months old, Penny brought Bruce to the Rotary Centre after his pediatrician diagnosed him with mild cerebral palsy. He was referred to Dr. Glenn McFadden, who was the organization's first medical director. Bruce struggled with sitting, crawling and talking. Throughout the years, he benefited from speech, physiotherapy and occupational therapy.

Five years after first walking through the doors, Penny was offered a part-time position in the speech department as a speech aide. Another five years went by, and the full-time position as the first ever Volunteer Coordinator was offered in 1979 — a position she held until her retirement in 2004. Along with this role, Penny's responsibilities over the years also encompassed public relations, audio visual services as well as looking after the Resource Centre.

Throughout Penny's time on staff, Bruce continued to benefit from the services offered including a life skills program. When he was 15 years old, Bruce began his volunteer career with the organization. To this day, over 35 years later, Bruce is still going strong! It's no wonder the first word that pops into Bruce's mind when he thinks of KidsAbility is "volunteer."

"Volunteering is a big part of my life. I love working with my mom, meeting and working with nice people," says Bruce. Over the years, there isn't much that Bruce hasn't volunteered to help with, always stepping in when he's needed. Whether it is helping to maintain the grounds, tallying grocery tapes back in the day or being that friendly face on Rotary Fun Day to help direct parking, Bruce has given back and remains a familiar face at KidsAbility.

When he's not at KidsAbility, Bruce volunteers in the community and works part-time as a grocery clerk — a position he has held for more than 25 years. Bruce attributes his confidence, speech, social skills and ability to be an active member in the community all to KidsAbility.

Although Penny retired a number of years ago, she continues to volunteer and reflects: "It was a wonderful place to work. I love this place so much that I needed to continue as a volunteer. I saw many positive changes of how people with disabilities were viewed and what they are capable of."

Penny is most proud of Bruce, and what he has achieved because of the role that the Rotary Centre played in his life. She witnessed first-hand how these life-altering therapies help children and youth to realize their own potential. She reiterates to parents today: "Trust that you will succeed with the services you need. Be your child's team leader."



*Bruce MacVicar &  
Penny MacVicar*

Alumnus, Volunteers and  
Staff - KidsAbility 1974–2004



# 1970's

1970

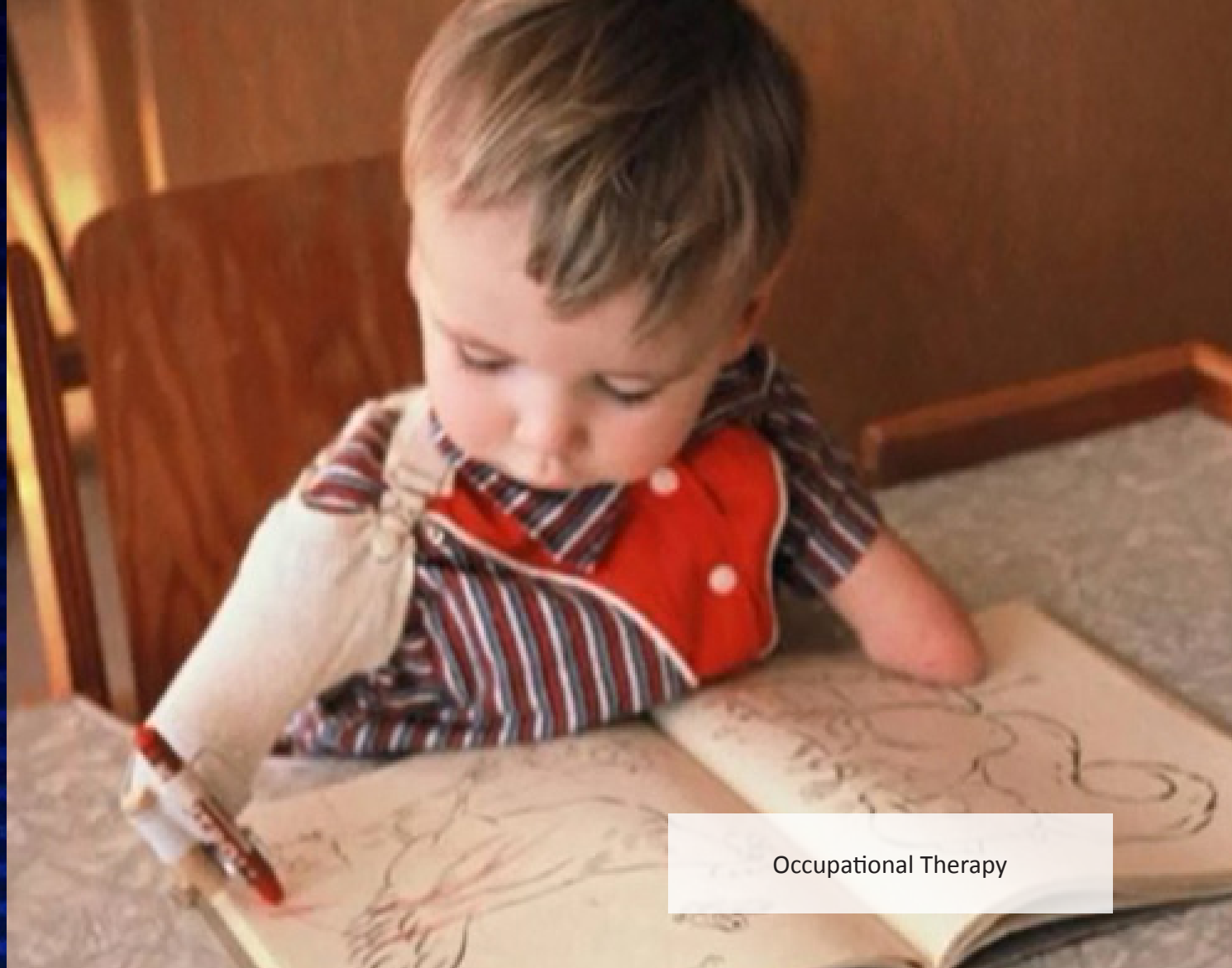
Plans are underway to meet the growing needs of the Centre. An addition to create a second floor over the existing one-story building is completed at a cost of \$150,000 and funded entirely by the Rotary Clubs of Kitchener and Waterloo. This new space provides much needed room to accommodate the growth of occupational therapy and speech-language pathology. The expansion also provides an area for a social worker and psychological testing. Since the last addition in 1963, the caseload has doubled.

1972

Increasing demands for speech therapy in Cambridge prompts the opening of a speech clinic so that children living south of the 401 do not have to travel to the crowded Centre in Kitchener. The speech clinic is set up in rented space in Grandview Medical Centre in Cambridge.

1977

The K-W Rotary Children's Centre serves 557 children on the active caseload supported by 42 staff, a 12-person medical panel, 100 volunteers, 25 Rotarians from Kitchener-Waterloo and Cambridge on the Board, with a budget of \$550,000.



Occupational Therapy



Children at the Centre pose around a papier mâché cake in honour of the 50th anniversary of Rotary International.



577

children and youth served in 1977



# 1980's

**1980**

Roy Brown, the long-time serving executive director of the K-W Rotary Children's Centre, retires in December. Roy served as the Centre's first administrator and was celebrated with a friendly "roast" by the staff to acknowledge his tremendous contributions over the years.

**1984**

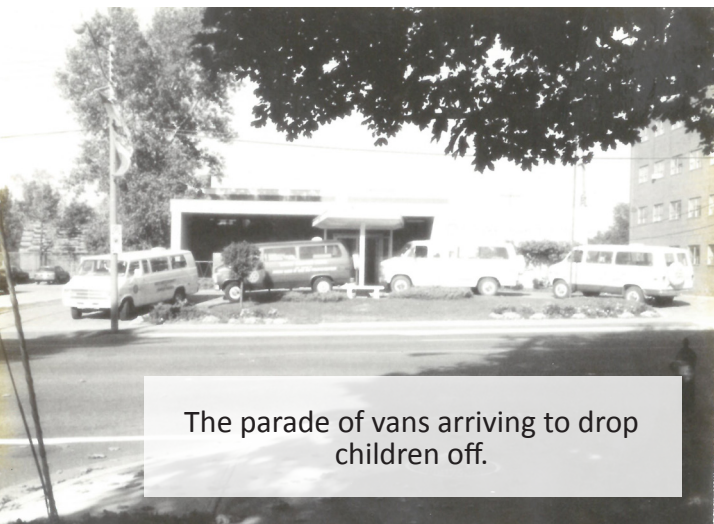
Funded by Rotarians, a larger and more permanent site opens in Cambridge at 1425 Bishop Street. Within three years of opening, the new site sees 165 children.

**1986**

In 1986, the Board of Directors realizes that the current facilities can no longer accommodate the ever-growing number of children and families that come through the doors each year. Planning begins for a new facility that will be able to serve more children.



Preschool Services



The parade of vans arriving to drop children off.



School Classroom



Augmentative Communication Services



**1,000**

children and youth served in 1986





# Leading the Way

In 1985, Stephen Swatridge joined the K-W Rotary Children's Centre located in Kitchener. This small, medically oriented clinic focused on a narrow range of children with physical and speech-language challenges. Change was on the horizon and Stephen was the person to lead the Centre forward.

"The first formal work plan I submitted to the Board identified three goals to be achieved by 1990: To achieve Accreditation status, to computerize our processes and to build a new physical space to replace the Kitchener site," says Stephen.

On their own each would have been an ambitious goal, but by 1988, KidsAbility, as it would eventually be known, received its first three-year Accreditation award and the support staff said "goodbye" to their typewriters shifting into the world of computerization. The final of the first three goals laid out in 1985 would become a reality 10 years later when the ribbon was cut on the newly constructed Waterloo site. Thanks to the remarkable fundraising efforts, the site opened debt free.

The new site not only provided much-needed room for existing staff, programs and services, but it also allowed KidsAbility to begin to expand services to better support the increasingly complex needs of its children and youth.

"We built an integrated system of services, supports and facilities that enabled children and youth with special needs to develop their potential and create for themselves a place of belonging in Waterloo Region. In so doing, we helped families to better understand both the nature of their child's challenges and the potential for their development."

After 27 years of leadership, which saw the opening of sites in Cambridge, Guelph, Fergus, Mount Forest and Kitchener, Stephen hung up his KidsAbility name badge in 2013 and welcomed his successor, Linda Kenny.

"My life was blessed by the people who surrounded the children and families served by KidsAbility – our staff, volunteers and board members. I enjoyed, for very different reasons, the challenges and the opportunities over the years."

"I reflect on many warm, enduring memories of KidsAbility that include the enthusiasm and creativity of the volunteers; the commitment of our staff to bring only their best in service to children and families; the operational excellence of the staff leaders who nurtured growth even through times of financial restraint; the leadership and altruism of our Board; and the financial and moral support of the Rotary Clubs who, after decades of service, continue to be dedicated to the mission. My most enduring memory is that of the children who faced their challenges with spirit and determination while being supported by their families whose love and encouragement served as excellent examples of how to live life to the fullest and fulfill one's potential."



*Stephen Swatridge*

---

Chief Executive Officer - KidsAbility  
1985–2013



# The Gift of Song

Jeff Poolton's song "Miracle of Love" has become an anthem at KidsAbility. Written as a tribute to his parents and other caregivers of children with special needs, this talented local artist and KidsAbility alumnus is using his incredible voice to make a difference for an organization that continues to be a part of his life.

Diagnosed with cerebral palsy, KidsAbility became a large part of Jeff's life as he benefited from therapy to help him gain strength, mobility and independence. When he was seven years old, Jeff would sit with his mom at the piano and sing. This was to be the beginning of his life journey.

Singing became a large part of Jeff's therapy as a child as he endured many surgeries. Following each of Jeff's surgeries growing up, KidsAbility's therapists were there to help get him back on his feet. For Jeff, he received more than just therapy to help him walk. He received support that played a critical role in his life in high school through Rob, a social worker, who helped Jeff work through emotions that arose in coping with social situations.

"In one word, I describe KidsAbility as 'community.'"

One thing Jeff always noticed and appreciated amongst the kindness, encouragement and patience that he experienced was that "can't" didn't exist – it was always "you can do it."

"Disabilities are not viewed like they were 30 years ago," remarks Jeff. He believes that KidsAbility has been a part of that, as he himself has gained much confidence and is now an advocate for persons with disabilities. "One of the neat things that is happening now is when I provide musical entertainment at area retirement homes, the residents are pleasantly surprised that someone with a disability is doing so well. I've been able to educate them through the storytelling I weave through in my shows."

Jeff married his wife, Jennifer, in 2011 and they have a son. His favourite memory at KidsAbility happened not as a child, but as an adult when he had the opportunity to open for Justin Hines at a fundraiser for the organization.

Jeff shares his music throughout the community and has chosen to donate a portion of every sale of his debut CD "Welcome to My World" to KidsAbility. These proceeds, along with the proceeds from his seasonal concerts, allow Jeff to give back and say "thank you" for all the support he received as a client. The proceeds have helped to fund Firefly's Music Therapy program which is appropriate given the role that music has had in Jeff's life.



*Jeff* Poolton

---

Alumnus and Donor



# A Gentle Man with a Kind Heart

It became a ritual. Every Friday night, John Lynch and his wife, Mary, drove to an empty field on the outskirts of Waterloo. Once there, John started pacing the grounds. He pointed to stakes driven into the earth and explained to Mary what they represented — a therapy room, gymnasium, swimming pool.

For John, that empty field was the realization of a long-held dream: the creation of a modern treatment facility — the present-day KidsAbility Centre for Child Development.

Mary remembers fondly, “John watched the construction of the project from the moment they broke ground to the ribbon cutting. He could not have been prouder.” When the building was officially opened, both KidsAbility and John Lynch were declared “community treasures.”

John’s journey with KidsAbility started in 1982 and continued to 2015, the year he passed away. As Mary states, “John spent so much time at KidsAbility, it was his second home.” Therefore, KidsAbility found it only appropriate to name a room after him.

Described as a “gentle man who wanted to make a difference in the world,” John set out to do just that. At KidsAbility, he became president of the Board and later the Foundation Board. In each role, he used his experience as a tax partner at KPMG to grow the organization and provide a sound foundation to support the needs of the children. Perhaps more importantly, he acted as a mentor, sharing his expertise and wisdom, which had an indelible impact on all those he met.

It is no surprise that in 2005 John received KidsAbility Foundation’s highest honour — the Outstanding Supporter Butterfly Award — for his contributions and ongoing commitment to the organization. As a Rotarian of 40 years who epitomized the values of “Service Above Self,” John was also awarded the Paul Harris Fellow.

In 2016, the Rotary Club of Waterloo’s annual Golf Fore KidsAbility tournament was held as a tribute to John. The response was overwhelming with the tournament selling out well in advance. The community came out in droves to show their support, respect and love for John.

For a gentle man who wanted to make a difference in the world, John did just that! At KidsAbility, the impact of his efforts are clear to all those who had the pleasure of working by his side.



*John & Mary Lynch*

---

Volunteer, Donor, Rotarian and  
2005 Outstanding Supporter Award Recipient



# Authoring Her Success

To begin each journey, you must start with the first step. Melissa Martz began her journey in 1977 when she was 11 months old. Like many children, she was referred by her pediatrician. Diagnosed with a mild form of cerebral palsy, Melissa initially received physiotherapy and occupational therapy as she showed no interest in walking in her early days. If you had told her family back then that she would go on to not only compete but win, for three consecutive years, the five-kilometre race in her age category at Canada's only competitive walking race, they might not have believed you!

Over the years, Melissa benefited from speech therapy, nursery school, swimming lessons, and the list could go on. The support that her parents received from KidsAbility, of course then affectionately known as the Rotary Centre, helped them to realize that Melissa had a great future despite any disability.

When Melissa thinks back on her days at KidsAbility, she remembers therapists like Kathy, her educational assistant Wendy and even her bus driver Bill who all made a mark in her life. The first word that comes to mind when Melissa thinks about KidsAbility is "love."

Today, Melissa is celebrating a 20-year career as a Nanny. To her list of accomplishments she can also add "author". A local and published writer of two books, Melissa wanted to help tell the stories of the thousands of children and youth whose lives were impacted by KidsAbility over the years. This book wouldn't have been possible without her talent, time and dedication, having taken a leadership role in showcasing what Potential Realized has looked like over the years through the stories of our alumni, staff, donors, volunteers, Rotarians and community partners.

In 2007, as KidsAbility was marking its 50th anniversary, Melissa was invited to share her story as part of the celebrations. That initial invitation sparked Melissa to become a volunteer at special events such as the Kids Can't Wait Radiothon and a donor. She is very proud to say that she was one of the inaugural members of the "I Make a

Difference Club" and that it is gratifying to know that she has helped countless children to receive life-changing therapies through monthly giving and a portion of the sales that she donates from her published books.

When asked what she would say to parents early on their journey at KidsAbility, she replies: "Don't give up on your child. They have a wonderful future ahead of them. And, then, I would share my story with them!"



*Melissa Martz*

---

Alumna, Volunteer and Donor



# An Experience To Cherish

From her family practice located next door to the Rotary Centre, Dr. Janet Speight could watch as the little yellow school buses pulled up to the Centre each day. She was familiar with the work of the organization as well as its medical director, Dr. John Whaley, having referred patients to him. Always drawn to pediatric medicine and with her husband's encouragement with whom she shared her family practice, Dr. Speight took the role of KidsAbility's Medical Director in 1988. It was to be a new passion and opportunity that she would cherish.

"I had lots of support," remarks Dr. Speight. "The therapists were extremely knowledgeable and were a great resource." Described by a colleague as one of the few examples where working in a team was more than an idea, but rather a practice, Dr. Speight looked forward to Wednesdays — the day out of her week that was reserved for KidsAbility.

She remembers the early days perched at a desk in the basement of the old site on King Street where the medical records team sat, doing her paperwork. The dream for a larger and more appropriate site was one that Dr. Speight shared with the team to better address the growing and more complex needs of the children. In 1995, that dream was realized and Dr. Speight smiles as she remembers the opening of the Waterloo Centre alongside a little boy with a large toy tractor.

The children seen at the Centre increased each year and from children with mostly physical disabilities and communication disorders referrals began to include children with Down syndrome and other genetic disorders, children born with extreme prematurity and children with developmental delays from undiagnosed causes. When KidsAbility made the commitment to serve children with autism spectrum disorder — a group of children not previously seen — the cases became still more complex and the number of children served expanded enormously. The skills and experience learned from the multi-disciplinary team that Dr. Speight was a part of followed her into her family practice, giving her great insight into when to make a referral for a child, as well as being able to reassure and educate families on what they would encounter.

Some of the biggest achievements that Dr. Speight recounts are the links made with other doctors in the community, with pediatricians at McMaster in Hamilton, and the partnership

forged with McMaster Medical School's Kitchener campus. Family medicine residents now had real-life, meaningful opportunities to learn about children with special needs and their families — an area of medicine that could be intimidating.

Retirement was on the horizon for Dr. Speight and after a year of planning, in 2009 she and her husband closed their family practice. However, retiring from KidsAbility wasn't something that Dr. Speight was quite ready for until two years later. Stepping down as KidsAbility's final Medical Director in 2011, she reflects upon her experience: "I always looked at this as an amazing opportunity I was given to be a part of medicine that I wouldn't have experienced otherwise."



*Dr. Janet Speight*

---

Medical Director - KidsAbility  
1988–2011



# Ahead of His Time

Community builder Dan Lajoie attended the K-W Rotary Children's Centre more than 40 years ago but still recalls passing the receptionist's desk as he came to school each day. Eyeing the adding machine on her desk with the tape of paper, Dan would always stop and play with it for a few minutes. To this day, that is his favourite memory.

Dan first came to the Rotary Centre when he was three years old in a stroller. By the time he left, Dan was using an electric wheelchair. "At the time, I was the youngest ever to be fitted for an electric wheelchair." Nowadays, electric wheelchairs are extremely common not only at KidsAbility, but in the community. Back then, they were rare, so much so that Dan's electric wheelchair as a child garnered local television coverage!

Wheelchairs in the early 1980's were not often seen in mainstream schools. This concerned Dan's parents at the time because it meant that he would be forced to go to a special school — something they did not want for Dan. Therapists and staff at The Rotary Centre provided support and advocacy, helping Dan to be able to attend a mainstream school.

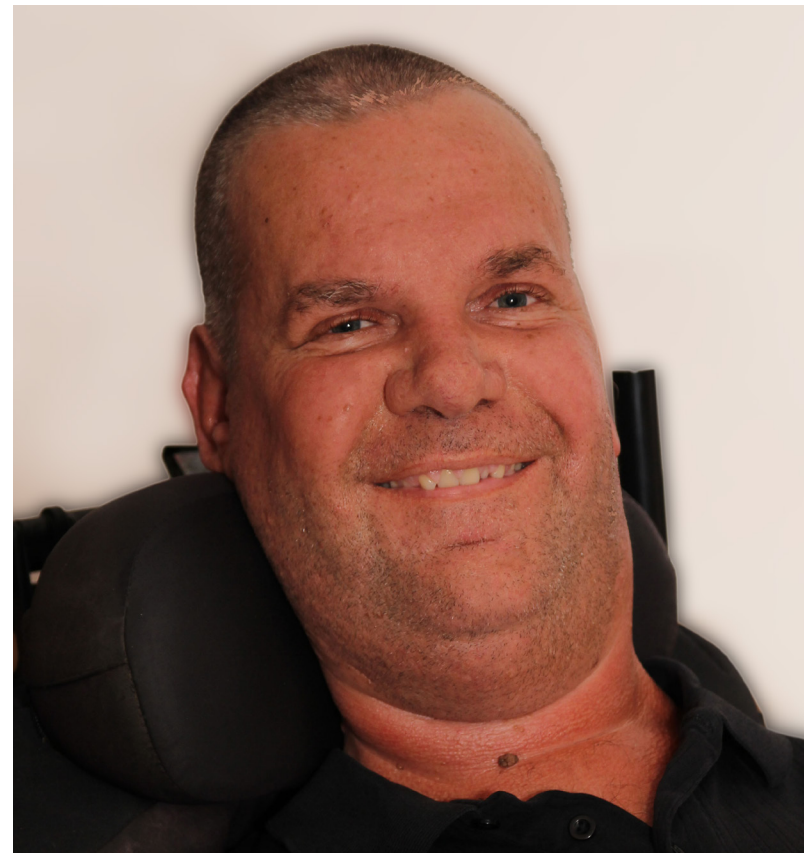
"The first word that comes to mind when I think of KidsAbility is 'helpful,'" says Dan. Many years later, long after Dan's days of physiotherapy, occupational therapy and seating clinic appointments growing up, he was able to give back to the organization that was a fixture in his life serving on the KidsAbility Board of Directors from 2006 to 2008. "I had the opportunity as an adult to give back to this phenomenal organization and sit on the Board. Working with people like Stephen Swatridge was wonderful," remarks Dan. He adds that KidsAbility sets the standard for accessing special care for children with special needs. "It's an anchor for parents."

Dan is married, has two children and is working in the accessible housing sector. He has these words of advice to share with parents beginning their journey: "Continue to have hope. Focus on your kid, they have needs aside from their disability. And, be patient — in time everything will work out."

---

“ It's an anchor for parents. ”

---



*Dan* Lajoie

---

Alumnus and  
Board Member - KidsAbility 2006–2008



# Decades of Memories

Since September 1975, when you walked through the front doors at the K-W Rotary Children's Centre in Kitchener, or later at the Hallmark Drive location of KidsAbility, you most likely will have been greeted by Mary Helen Frawley. She has been that familiar voice and face greeting everyone with the warmth, humour and smile that she is famous for.

An alumna herself, having received speech therapy at the Rotary Centre as a child, Mary Helen was hired by executive secretary Myrtle Schacht. "Myrtle was my hero and mentor – she gave me my 'lucky stay,'" she says.

Her colleagues became friends and when Mary Helen moved into her own apartment, the staff threw her a shower and outfitted her apartment! When she began her career with KidsAbility in 1975, there were only 25 staff in one location. Now in 2017, there are more than 220 employees in total, spanning eight locations.

Mary Helen believes that "potential realized" happens for every child and hopes KidsAbility can give that opportunity to generations of children far into the future. She herself has witnessed four decades of successes made possible through the support of Rotarians, donors, staff and volunteers.

A moment in Mary Helen's vast career that gives her an incredible sense of pride was when the Rotary Club of Waterloo bestowed their highest award that they can honour a person with, a Paul Harris Fellow Award; it means the world to her and she wears the symbol of this honour, a pin, daily.

Mary Helen has dedicated her career to the organization she once benefited from as a child, including serving as a volunteer trustee on the KidsAbility School Board for five years.

"I love seeing all the children come in every day. When I am at the mall and see them, they recognize me."

Although the organization has grown and changed over the years, that familiar and friendly face can still be found at KidsAbility's Waterloo location welcoming the next generation of children, families, staff, donors and volunteers.



*Mary Helen Frawley*

---

Alumna, Staff Member - KidsAbility and  
KidsAbility School Authority Board Member  
2009–2014



# For the Children

“It’s all about the children,” beams long-time classroom volunteer Judy Winterburn as she recalls making the decision in October 1979 to volunteer at the K-W Rotary Children’s Centre, a place she was first introduced to in 1965 with her nursing school class.

Over 50 years later after that chance encounter, every Wednesday morning, you will find Judy in one of KidsAbility School’s junior kindergarten classes in Waterloo. However, Judy often can be found throughout the week creating bulletin boards for the school or helping with field trips. Judy frequently takes her work with her, preparing classroom materials at home. She and her husband, Dennis, also support KidsAbility annually with a financial contribution.

“Family”: It is the first word that comes to Judy’s mind when she thinks about KidsAbility, remembering many lunch breaks where she had the chance to get to know therapists, staff, teachers and volunteers over some friendly conversation.

Judy carries with her decades of memories, but her favourite one occurred more than 30 years ago. She remembers watching the exchange of two children, a boy and a girl, around the age of 8 or 9 years old. The girl had paralysis and was able to tap on a keyboard with her mouth. The young boy, who also had paralysis, was able to use his left arm. She remembers both of them being so proud of their own unique abilities.

Judy’s wish for KidsAbility is that the organization continues to receive the support that is needed so that services can grow and expand to meet the needs of the children. Volunteering at KidsAbility is of utmost importance to Judy “because the children are important.”

Judy describes KidsAbility to others often by saying: “It’s a magical place, a happy place, filled with people who care and want potential realized for every child.”

---

“ It’s all about the children. ”

---



*Judy* Winterburn

---

Volunteer and Donor



# Investing in a Brighter Future

What does success look like? As a child, for Jason Koehler it meant learning how to take his first steps, how to use a walker and valuable life and social skills. However, today, success is a career as an Investment Advisor with a large firm in Ontario and living life to its fullest.

Faced with the unknown, Jason's parents brought him to KidsAbility at the suggestion of local pediatrician Dr. Thornback. At the age of two, Jason began a journey that would become foundational in his growth to help shape the man he would become. Jason benefited from physio and occupational therapy, as well as many different life and social skills groups, eventually receiving a diagnosis of cerebral palsy. "It was at that point that my parents realized I wasn't going to be like other kids. I had some unique challenges. Unaware of the extent of what the disability was going to be, KidsAbility certainly gave them, if nothing else, an emotional support structure," says Jason.

One of Jason's favourite memories was in the junior kindergarten classroom at KidsAbility School. He fondly remembers taking all of the sand from the classroom sand bin and putting it into the water bin. For him this was significant and still brings a smile to his face. "I probably got in trouble for that at the time, but as a little guy, I thought that was a fantastic idea. It made me feel like a normal kid. There, I wasn't someone with a disability. I was just 'Jason' doing things that a normal kid would do."

Throughout his early years and into his teens, KidsAbility provided Jason with the programs, therapy and support to teach him the skills he would need. One program in particular was an after school youth program that gave him exposure to kids in similar situations such as facing the challenges of being a teenager with special needs.

As an adult, Jason felt a pull to give back to the organization that made a difference in his life. Jason joined a group that he was very familiar with: Rotary. Joining the Rotary Club of Waterloo, where he was a member for six years, Jason had the opportunity to devote his energy, talents and abilities

to supporting the important work of Rotary, including being a strong supporter of KidsAbility. Jason is still actively involved in the community and maintains close connections to Rotary.

"I went from rolling around to taking my first steps to being able to walk independently to living on my own. These are things that took years, but if I wouldn't have had patience — my own to deal with it and my family's to cope with it — the support of KidsAbility to get me through it, these things wouldn't have happened."



*Jason* Koehler

---

Alumnus and Former Rotarian



# Achieving Potential

Reminiscing about a particular moment from her days at the K-W Rotary Children's Centre makes Karen Morris smile. That moment in particular: a child working with his physiotherapy aide in the halls of the Rotary Centre, singing at the top of his lungs, "I've been working on the highway."

"I myself have a disability and some medical issues that cause me pain, and just when I thought I couldn't work any further, I would hear this sweet voice, and it cheered me up and gave me the strength and courage to continue," Karen says.

In 1988, Karen decided to apply for a social worker position because she believed she could relate to the families and children because of her physical disability. The examples shown by both her parents — her mother, Eva Morris, who drove the Centre's school bus, and her father, Paul Morris, a volunteer who made quite an impact with the children there — confirmed her decision. "There are many psychosocial issues growing up with a disability, and social work helps families and children address these needs through individual counselling, group work and teamwork with the rest of the staff," she explains. Karen worked at the K-W Rotary Children's Centre until 1998, not too long after the big move to the new Waterloo site.

If you were to ask Karen what KidsAbility is all about, she would say: "KidsAbility is a family-focused centre where a multidisciplinary team, involving family, physio, occupational and speech therapies, along with social work and psychology, works together to help children with disabilities meet their full potential."

Learning that the children she worked with are successfully employed in the community makes Karen beam with pride in knowing that she had a small part in making this happen. For her, it makes the words "achieving potential" all the more relevant.

---

“ ..just when I thought I couldn't work any further, I would hear this sweet voice, and it cheered me up and gave me the strength and courage to continue... ”

---



*Karen* Morris

---

Social Worker - KidsAbility  
1988–1998



# The Love of Teaching

A love for teaching at KidsAbility School is the essence of Jennifer Ross — 25 years as a teacher and now, as a classroom volunteer in her retirement. This is why the one word that comes to mind when she thinks about KidsAbility is simply “children.”

“My favourite memory is from years ago when I was working at the North Waterloo Children’s Centre School at the Rotary Centre on King Street. I was hired by principal Grace Skanes. The entire staff at the Centre was gathered waiting for a meeting to begin. Unexpectedly, we could hear the faint sounds of a bagpipe in the corridor that became louder as the Rotary President was led into the meeting by a bagpiper to make an announcement...and what an announcement! A new centre had been approved, funding would be made available and we could begin the process of planning new facilities and services for the children of Waterloo Region. Incredible excitement!”

KidsAbility also took on a different meaning for Jennifer when one of her sons was referred to the organization for speech and occupational therapies. She describes the therapists as always being calm, reassuring and professional. Jennifer’s wish for the future of KidsAbility is that the organization continues to endeavour to remain current, incorporating advances in research and technology and supporting the professional development of its staff so that they can continue to provide the same top-notch services her family benefited from and Jennifer herself helped to provide. Bigger dreams for Jennifer also include the elimination of a wait for services as well as the expansion of KidsAbility School to other communities, such as Kitchener and Guelph.

She describes KidsAbility School as a highly specialized school for four-year-olds providing support to families and strategies to help every special student be as successful as possible. This happens through the teamwork of school and therapy staff devising the goals and individual plans. “There are only six treatment centre schools in the province; we are so fortunate to have one of them in Waterloo Region.”

---

“ There are only six treatment centre schools in the province; we are so fortunate to have one of them in Waterloo Region. ”

---



*Jennifer Ross*

---

Teacher - KidsAbility School Authority  
1988–2013



# A Career that Spans Communities

Not many of the staff at KidsAbility can say they have worked at every location. With the exception of Fergus, Christa Bayley can!

Prior to working at the K-W Rotary Children's Centre, Christa worked as a physiotherapist at The Arthritis Society. She met a few people who worked at the Centre, thought it would be a great place to work and, wanting a change, decided to apply for a physiotherapy position there.

In the span of a 22-year career working for the organization, Christa worked as a part-time physiotherapist at the K-W Rotary Children's Centre at its original home on King Street in Kitchener, the new site in Waterloo, as well as KidsAbility's sites in Cambridge and Guelph. Christa retired in 2003, just a few years after the Fergus site opened. If Christa hadn't retired when she did, she might have been able to tick the Fergus site off her list too!

Christa absolutely loved working at KidsAbility. "We all worked as a team to give children the help they needed to reach their goals," Christa says. "It was a lot of fun working at KidsAbility," she adds. With the team approach, it's no surprise that the first word that pops in mind thinking about KidsAbility is "family."

The greatest achievements Christa experienced at KidsAbility were the opportunities to work with countless children and help them overcome physical challenges. "I am still in contact with a few of my former clients," she says. She wants to remind parents that if their child's development isn't up to par, to bring them to KidsAbility to be assessed and receive the best of the best in services to help them on their way.

Christa continues to help KidsAbility in retirement by participating in The Cambridge Rotary Classic and the Guelph Superhero Run.

---

“ We all worked as a team to give children the help they needed to reach their goals. ”

---



*Christa* Bayley

---

Physiotherapist - KidsAbility  
1981–2003



# Cultivating Potential

Volunteer turned supply teacher, turned teacher, turned principal: this was Carol Shantz's life at the Rotary Centre. She started in the 1970's volunteering in Grace Skanes' classroom. Grace became Carol's mentor and was the first principal of the School. With her mentor Grace at the helm, Carol taught for 18 years. It was upon Grace's retirement in 1995 that Carol made her final career move, taking over the reins and becoming KidsAbility School's principal for six years until her own retirement in 2001.

"Cultivating potential" is what Carol thinks of when she thinks of KidsAbility. These words are very poignant when she recalls her favourite memory of helping to move the original Rotary Centre on King Street in Kitchener to the new facility on Hallmark Drive in Waterloo in 1995. "The education staff worked on the planning of the new facility with architect Roger Farwell, designing accessible, functional classrooms," she says.

Carol witnessed many changes in her 24 years with KidsAbility School. As KidsAbility changed to meet the needs of the children, so too did the school that at one time had offered classes from Grades 1 to 8. Over the years, the focus of the school program shifted to the primary grades and in 1984, Carol, along with a speech pathologist and another teaching colleague, implemented a junior kindergarten language class that focuses to this day on providing half-day special education programs.

Carol is proud to have been a part of initiating and planning for the first Cambridge classroom when KidsAbility expanded its site at the Chaplin Family Y. This was important to Carol so that students in Cambridge didn't have to travel long on a bus to go to school.

Wanting to leave a legacy at KidsAbility when she retired, Carol says: "My husband, Leroy, and I decided to start a bursary fund that supports recipients in achieving their potential in post-secondary education." To date, more than \$23,000 has been awarded to 17 KidsAbility alumni who have benefited from The Carol Shantz Bursary Award presented by Carol at a celebration event held at KidsAbility each year.



*Carol Shantz*

---

Teacher and Principal - KidsAbility School Authority  
1973–2001 and Donor



# Parallel Paths to a Shared Dream

*SN*  
Never did Tanya Hendry ever dream growing up that she would be married, drive a car and own a house.

Tanya was born 2 ½ months prematurely making history that year at St. Joseph's in London for being the youngest baby they saved. Diagnosed with cerebral palsy as a toddler, her parents were happy to finally have answers to the questions surrounding Tanya's delayed milestones.

Steve Hendry, just like his wife, was also born 2 ½ months prematurely. Doctors had painted a very bleak picture for his future. His parents were told he would not walk, talk and, truly, not amount to much of anything. Also receiving a diagnosis of cerebral palsy, Steve benefited from a lot of the same services that his wife did including speech, physio and occupational therapies.

"My favourite memory of the Rotary Centre was being among the first in the inaugural pilot project 'Teen Group.' Through that group I worked through anger issues, met others my own age with the same struggles — one of whom I became steadfast friends with and still am today," Steve says.

For Tanya, at one time she had aspired to be an ECE professional and turned to KidsAbility to complete a co-op work placement. She loved seeing the children progress and reach their potential. So much in fact that she continued on as a volunteer for five years. Working in the classroom is among her favourite achievements at KidsAbility.

Although most people assume that Tanya and Steve met at KidsAbility, it was actually through mutual friends that they were introduced. Eventually, they were married in 2003. It would be 10 years later that together they would do something that, at one time, Tanya didn't dream possible: becoming parents as they welcomed daughter McKayla to their family. When Tanya and Steve were young, a future so bright didn't seem possible.

Steve joined the Board of Directors at KidsAbility in 2005, bringing his talents and voice as a past client. He loves

meeting new families at KidsAbility. He tells them: "Never give up — don't walk away from it. Remember: your child's disability does not define him or her."

Tanya works as a home support worker and Steve is in customer service. Together, they are enjoying a full and independent life as they raise their daughter.

Steve is proud to have proved the doctors wrong who, when he was born, all too often used the word "can't". As for Tanya, she states: "I love being that glimmer of hope to never give up when parents today see Steve and I; they want that for their child."



*Tanya & Steve Hendry*

Alumni and Volunteers

# Seeing it from Both Sides

In her 30-year career as a social worker with the K-W Rotary Children's Centre, Barb Miller watched the organization grow from a small facility where, as she describes, "you knew almost every one of the clientele, to a big facility where you see new faces everyday."

"KidsAbility is filled with great little kids with great parents," says Barb with a smile. In all those years, Barb's favourite memory still remains of a little boy working with his physiotherapy aide singing "The Wheels on the Bus." She was most proud when, in September 1995, the location on Hallmark Drive was opened.

Barb also had the privilege of being a parent of a Rotary Centre client when she and her husband adopted a six-year-old girl with cerebral palsy who was on the Rotary Centre's caseload. "This gave me the experience of being a parent of a child with physical needs at the same time as being a staff member addressing similar issues with other parents," she says. These experiences gave Barb great insight and allowed her to see both sides of the relationship between staff and families.

Describing KidsAbility is not difficult for Barb given her rich history with the organization that she called home not only as a professional but as a family. "KidsAbility is a caring treatment centre where children have their needs addressed by a multidisciplinary team along with the goals of their parents."

Barb hopes that adequate resources will be available at KidsAbility to meet the needs of special children and their families in our community.

---

“ KidsAbility is filled with great little kids with great parents. ”

---



*Barb* Miller

---

Social Worker - KidsAbility  
1971–2001



# Fundraiser Extraordinaire

People thought he was off his rocker. Yet George Ayres had the last laugh as he proved all the naysayers wrong – eventually earning the title “Fundraiser Extraordinaire” for his efforts on behalf of children with special needs.

George and his wife Marilyn’s story goes back 50 years, when their two daughters, Margaret Ann and Janet, attended the K-W Rotary Children’s Centre (which eventually became KidsAbility). Born with cerebral palsy, the two girls received therapy at the facility located near Kitchener Collegiate Institute on King Street in Kitchener.

A crane operator at Babcock and Wilcox (where he worked for over 38 years), George wanted to give back to KidsAbility. Eventually, he decided to raise funds by running in the Cambridge Times Rotary Classic, an event held on behalf of KidsAbility. People scoffed, but George would not be dissuaded. To prepare for the run, he began training at the track by Galt Collegiate Institute, where he was often joined by Dr. Mike Lawrie (who also happened to chair the Cambridge Times Run). Together, they inspired each other to work for the good of the community.

To help support the run, George asked local Rotarians, his coworkers, fellow churchgoers and people on the street for donations. As Marilyn recalls, “George would talk to anyone, whether he knew them or not, telling them what he was doing. And they would give him money to support KidsAbility.”

The first year George participated in the Cambridge Times Rotary Classic, he obtained \$275 in sponsorship — a sum he never expected to raise. Imagine his surprise when he discovered that after 38 years of participating in the run, he had brought in more than \$180,000 — thus earning the title “Fundraiser Extraordinaire”!

In 2013, George hung up his sneakers. Yet the walls in the Golden Years Retirement Home (where he now resides with his wife) are a testament to his efforts on behalf of children and youth with special needs.

There are numerous awards and plaques from KidsAbility and Rotary, thanking the extraordinary man who refused to give up on his dream to help the organization that had meant so much to his family.



*George & Marilyn Ayres*

Donors and  
2008 Outstanding Supporter Award Recipient



# 1990's

**1994**

The ground is officially broken on April 15 on the property of the Centre's future site in Waterloo.

**1995**

The K-W Rotary Children's Centre completes construction of a 54,000-square-foot state-of-the-art facility in Waterloo to replace the smaller facility in Kitchener. This facility opens in September following a successful \$8 million capital campaign supported by government, local Rotary clubs, corporations and many private supporters.

**1996**

In the fall, Cambridge services moves into the newly constructed Cambridge Family YMCA on Hespeler Road. Our co-location partnership provides enhanced facilities for our children and families and is the first and only partnership of its kind in Canada.

**1999**

Following continued growth, a Guelph-based service team becomes a reality through pilot funding from the Ministry of Health, and a partnership through the City of Guelph. The caseload grows that year from just 17 children in September to 90 children by April 2000. The pilot proves to be a success and permanent funding is granted in 2000.

In November, the Board approves a new referral policy that makes it possible for a family, caregiver or community agency to refer a child for service. Up until now, referrals had to be made by a doctor. Referrals jump significantly as a result of this change from 978 referrals the year prior to 1,229. This change improves access to services and supports the goal of early intervention.



Fundraising begins to fund the new site located on over nine acres of property on Hallmark Drive.



Celebrating the ground breaking for the Centre's new home in Waterloo.





# 2000's



Therapy through Technology



KidsAbility School



Physiotherapy



Dr. Speight checks in on a little girl.



Family Skating in Guelph

**2000**

A Fergus site is established through the support of the Rotary Club of Fergus-Elora.

KidsAbility Foundation assumes the primary responsibility of fundraising on behalf of KidsAbility. Previously, they had been tasked with managing the endowment fund arising from bequests.

**2003**

May 30, the organization is officially renamed KidsAbility™ Centre for Child Development to more accurately reflect its mission, vision and purpose, and to respect Rotary International's request that "Rotary" no longer be used in the name.

In September, KidsAbility renews its strong partnership with the Cambridge YMCA opening an expanded site. A new classroom is added that allows KidsAbility School to increase enrollment from 62 to 81 children.

**2005**

KidsAbility's Guelph site moves to a newly renovated 5,000-square-foot site at the West End Community Centre

**2006**

The first annual Kids Can't Wait Radiothon raises \$108,000 over two days through the support of 96.7 CHYM FM.

**2008**

December 12, KidsAbility and the Michael G. DeGroote School of Medicine Waterloo Regional Campus at McMaster University celebrate a historic partnership. The new partnership provides medical students with training in family medicine and pediatrics and gives them an opportunity to learn about children with special needs and their families.

**4,100**

children and youth served in 2009





# The Inauspicious Rotarian

It's hard to imagine, but at one time Bob Collins-Wright was turned away from Rotary. But back in the early 1950's, only one person per company was allowed to be a member and the president at Simplicity (where Bob worked) already held that position. Eventually, the rules changed and Bob was brought into the fold as an associate member in 1955.

From this inauspicious beginning, Bob charted a remarkable course up the ranks of Rotary, culminating in his ascension to president in 1971. While his contribution to the Rotary Club of Preston-Hespeler cannot be understated, it was his association with KidsAbility where he truly left his mark.

The year was 1991 and the K-W Rotary Children's Centre was seeking to build a state-of-the-art facility in Waterloo to replace the older and smaller facility in Kitchener. Stephen Swatridge (CEO of the Centre) and John Lynch (Chairman of the Board) knew they needed to find individuals who could drive a major fundraising campaign. They turned to Bob and his close friend, Jack Weber, naming them co-chairs of the Fundraising Committee.

Enlisting the help of the 10 local Rotary clubs, Bob and Jack quickly received pledges of \$600,000 by the summer of 1991. When the government officially approved the building project in 1994, the two men had obtained promises from 835 companies, organizations and individuals for \$2,350,000. As Bob notes, "I took great pride at the groundbreaking for the new facility, as we were able to get so many people to give to such a deserving organization. After all, what's more important than a child? Kids make all the difference. Anything we can do to make their lives better, we should be doing."

On September 26, 1995 — after a successful \$8 million capital campaign supported by government, local Rotary Clubs, corporations and private supporters — the new Centre opened to great fanfare. While Bob would have us downplay his role, he truly rose from his inauspicious beginnings at Rotary to be a force who made a difference in the lives of so many in need. And for his efforts, he received KidsAbility's highest honour in 2006: The Outstanding Supporter Butterfly Award.

---

“ After all, what's more important than a child? ”

---



*Bob* Collins-Wright

---

Rotarian, Donor and  
2006 Outstanding Supporter Award Recipient



# A Home Away from Home

One of Dan Rocha's favourite events each spring is the annual Kids Can't Wait Radiothon making him a familiar face year after year. Dan is a long-time advocate for KidsAbility since his days as a client — a place that became a "home away from home" throughout his childhood.

Dan was born with brittle bone condition osteogenesis imperfecta, meaning his bones could break very easily. To date he has had more than 100 breaks. Therapists taught his family safe ways to position and transfer him from one place to another; Dan especially liked going swimming each week with his class.

"I always felt comfortable, respected, and wasn't at all judged," says Dan, who credits KidsAbility with helping him to come out of his shell and become the self-described social butterfly that he is today. One person who was instrumental in giving him the confidence to go out into the world and do great things was his junior kindergarten teacher, with whom he still shares a close friendship.

"They simply changed my life," says Dan. "My biggest wish is that all children going through the doors of KidsAbility have the opportunity to experience a similar opportunity to better their life like I did."

The one thing Dan likes to tell new clients is: "You can do it!" It's that attitude that has served Dan well. He has dreamed of having his own radio show for as long as he can remember and is actively pursuing his dreams.

When not dreaming about being on the radio, he continues to take an active role in the community: Dan is the director of Public Relations at the Kitchener Portuguese Club, has opened his own business as a DJ for hire, volunteers as a youth group leader at his church and is active on social media as a tireless advocate for local businesses and organizations.

"KidsAbility brought me out of my shell, personality wise, making me the confident man I am today."

---

“ KidsAbility brought me out of my shell, personality wise, making me the confident man I am today. ”

---



*Dan* Rocha

---

Alumnus and Volunteer



# Music with a Message

You might be surprised to learn that the first time that children’s entertainer Erick Traplin came to KidsAbility (then known as the K-W Rotary Children’s Centre) was to actually play for the Board of Directors. Back in 1999, a member of the Board that year had invited Erick to play. During this first meeting, he was given a tour and introduced to some of the children — after which he was hooked!

That same year, Erick wrote a song called “Kids Can’t Wait... for Your Helping Hand” echoing the theme for KidsAbility Foundation’s Kids Can’t Wait annual fundraising campaign. That song was featured on the CD bearing the same name, and included a special guest who accompanied Erick on vocals for his song “Love, Love, Love”: The 1999–2000 ambassador, Melissa Clark. The experience of working with Melissa remains Erick’s most cherished memory.

To date, more than \$6,000 has been raised from the sale of the CD. Over the years, Erick has written several other songs for KidsAbility and his musical talent always brings a string of smiles at special events. In 2007, Erick was honoured with KidsAbility Foundation’s highest award: The Outstanding Supporter Award. Erick says, “My support comes in the form of free concerts and 100% of the proceeds of the Kids Can’t Wait CD that go to support the services at KidsAbility. I like to give this way as it’s what I love to do, and I get to have some personal contact with the kids, parents and staff at KidsAbility.”

Erick humbly reflects: “My contribution is small, but I think that everybody’s giving, big or small, goes into a pot that gets divided up to make a big difference in the lives of children and families in our community. Donations of either money or services is an investment towards a healthy, happy society.”

“Help”: That is the first word that comes to mind when Erick thinks of KidsAbility. His immediate impression back in 1999 still stands true today — that KidsAbility is a place that, when parents are at a loss and don’t know where to turn for help, can provide guidance and incredible services for their children. It’s a place where kids have the opportunity to reach their full potential in a loving and supportive environment.

---

“ I like to give this way as it’s what I love to do, and I get to have some personal contact with the kids, parents and staff at KidsAbility. ”

---



*Erick Traplin*

---

Donor and  
2007 Outstanding Supporter Award Recipient



# Love, Love, Love

*M*elissa wishes that there was no longer a waiting list for the services provided by KidsAbility. She knows the importance of early intervention.

Melissa has cerebral palsy. She began receiving services at KidsAbility when she was one year old. Melissa attended school at KidsAbility and while in school benefited from a wide range of services from KidsAbility's team of staff and volunteers. "I had to do lots of hard work to improve my fine and gross motor skills but my therapists made it look like play to me and I had so much fun."

One of the ways in which Melissa's therapy continued outside the walls of KidsAbility was through parent support and education. Melissa's parents were taught how to help Melissa do some of the exercises with her at home, as well as how to modify equipment. "I remember how much I loved the parallel bars KidsAbility loaned us. I spent so much time exercising and playing on them with my brother," says Melissa.

Being named the first ambassador for the 1999–2000 Kids Can't Wait campaign was a proud moment for Melissa. During that year as the ambassador, she also had the opportunity to provide guest vocals with Erick Traplin for the song "Love, Love, Love" that was featured on his CD released that year called "Kids Can't Wait...for Your Helping Hand." "It was a great experience that I will always be very proud of," Melissa says with a smile.

To this day, these two moments from her days at KidsAbility remain Melissa's most cherished accomplishments. "As an ambassador, I did many speeches and interviews about how KidsAbility changed my life."

If Melissa could tell a family at the beginning of their journey at KidsAbility one thing it would be: "Don't give up. Appreciate every moment."

Presently, Melissa volunteers at the Cambridge Butterfly Conservatory in the gift shop. She goes to a day program at Carousel Dance Centre and she is involved in all aspects of creating a play with her friends. She also goes to a day program at AIM where she participates in their e-waste program to help the environment. She shares, "Please support KidsAbility so that other children can blossom just like me."



*Melissa* Clark

---

Kids Can't Wait Ambassador  
1999–2000



# A Special Citizen

Throughout KidsAbility's history, Rotary clubs have played a crucial role in the evolution of the organization. In fact, the original treatment centre that was established in 1957 was called the K-W Rotary Children's Centre. It's no wonder then that Steve Cameron became tied to KidsAbility the moment he joined the Rotary Club of Waterloo in 1981.

"At that time, an individual's induction to a Rotary Club that supported KidsAbility was conducted in the boardroom of the K-W Rotary Children's Centre," explains Steve. "So your induction to become a Rotarian was inextricably linked to the service work that was its major emphasis in Kitchener-Waterloo."

For Rotarians, their commitment to KidsAbility was very personal and brought about unforgettable life experiences. Often, a member would be assigned a child who attended the Centre. The Rotarian would then take that child to the annual Christmas party and May fishing derby (which, although hard to believe, was held at one of the local hotels whose pool was stocked with fish).

As Steve states, "For many years I was assigned a student with muscular dystrophy. As a young person, he was able to partake in many of the activities, including pony rides without assistance. As he got older, his muscles became weaker. The last time I had the opportunity to take him to the festive season party in December, he was in a wheelchair and his abilities had become much more limited. These personal interactions are particularly meaningful for volunteers and at the same time illuminate the importance of volunteering."

Eventually, Steve joined the KidsAbility Board and became Chair when work began on the new site in Waterloo. His volunteer efforts proved essential in the growth and success of KidsAbility, which he describes as a "world-class facility carrying out world-class treatment for its special citizens."

And for his volunteer efforts, KidsAbility will always include Steve in our thoughts as a special citizen in his own right — one whose life was committed to assisting others in need.

---

“ These personal interactions are particularly meaningful for volunteers and at the same time illuminate the importance of volunteering. ”

---



*Stephen* Cameron

---

Rotarian, Volunteer and  
2011 Elaine Ormston  
Outstanding Butterfly Award Recipient



# Harley's Life Journey

When Harley Kaufmann-Sacrey's mother first brought him to KidsAbility when he was just four months old, she never imagined that 10 years later her son would be asked to be the Kids Can't Wait Ambassador in 2002–2003. Fast forward seven years, as she watched as Harley received the inaugural Carol Shantz Bursary Award. This graduate of the University of Waterloo's Legal Studies program with a graduate certificate in Public Service from Conestoga College is removing barriers and challenging perceptions of what a person with spina bifida can do!

Harley benefited from a wide variety of therapy and support services at KidsAbility until 18 years of age. The memories that he carries of his years at KidsAbility are some of his favourite moments throughout his childhood and young adult life.

"Playing in the pool was always fun and borrowing toys from the toy library were my favourite memories as a child," Harley states. "Receiving the bursary was my favourite memory as a young adult."

KidsAbility was very instrumental in Harley's life. "The first word that comes to mind thinking about KidsAbility is "access." Because of them, I have been able to access adaptive equipment, therapies, confidence, and even though I ended services at 18 years of age, KidsAbility still helped me in my university days with a bursary," Harley shares. Some of his many accomplishments at KidsAbility include learning to use a wheelchair, along with learning how to use braces.

One thing that helped Harley's mother when he was young was being able to talk to other parents whose children were facing the same challenges both early on and later in their journeys.

---

“ Receiving the bursary was my favourite memory as a young adult. ”

---



*Harley* Kaufmann-Sacrey

---

Kids Can't Wait Ambassador  
2002–2003 and  
2011 Carol Shantz Bursary Award Recipient

# A Lasting Legacy

*S*A charter member of the Westmount Rotary Club, Gord Ferguson truly embraced the motto of “Service Above Self.” Through his ties with Rotary, Gord quickly became involved with KidsAbility. In fact, many of his favourite memories come from his visits to the K-W Rotary Children’s Centre and the many fundraising drives he was involved with.

“As Rotary members, we used to visit the original site by the KW Hospital,” states Gord. “We would go in to see what was happening with the children and help out however we could. That was really great. We spent quite a bit of time trying to get the kids healthy and well.”

The Rotarians’ volunteer efforts were greatly appreciated, as were their fundraising efforts. From rubber duck races at Kaufman Flats to running bingo nights at a local hall to approaching community leaders for donations, Gord and his fellow members did whatever they could to make a difference.

And what a difference they made! Together with other Rotary Clubs, Rotarians were instrumental in raising funds to build KidsAbility’s Waterloo site in 1995. As Gord recalls, “I had the very distinct honour of digging the dirt as part of the groundbreaking. They gave me a hard hat and a silver shovel. I was very proud of that moment.”

Yet Gord didn’t stop there. He decided to leave a legacy gift for KidsAbility as well. “I had KidsAbility in my will, but I worried about it,” explains Gord. “You come to retirement and you don’t anticipate any illness. With the added expense of taking care of my wife and myself, I wasn’t sure I would still be able to give to KidsAbility. So I made out a cheque and delivered it to KidsAbility in advance to ensure they’d get the money.”

Today, Gord looks back with fondness at his time as a Rotarian and a volunteer at KidsAbility. As he sums up, “As Rotarians, we had all kinds of good fun and we hope that we helped the kids.”

---

“As Rotarians, we had all kinds of good fun and we hope that we helped the kids.”

---



*Gord & Shirley Ferguson*

---

Rotarians, Donors and Volunteers



# Up, Up and Away

Often when people meet Stacey Gorloff for the first time, she says that they are shocked to find out that this confident and talkative young woman ever received services at KidsAbility.

When she was young, Stacey's mom, Maureen, knew that something wasn't quite right; at 16 months of age she couldn't walk or talk. Maureen placed the call to KidsAbility, and it was this call from her determined mother that altered the course of Stacey's future.

Diagnosed with apraxia, Stacey's parents found themselves on a journey that they were not prepared for. For Stacey's two older siblings, walking and talking came naturally. This wasn't the case for Stacey. KidsAbility became a part of her family to help Stacey achieve these goals and more.

"I remember crying as a child because I wanted to do something so badly, and I just couldn't do it. Thankfully I had my mom behind me because she never gives up," says Stacey.

Through physiotherapy and occupational therapy, Stacey learned how to walk. Through speech therapy, she began to form words. One of the turning points for Stacey was when she looked up to the sky and strung three words together for the first time: Hot air balloon. Stacey recalls her parents saying that these precious three words made them stop in their tracks as they just stared in shock and amazement at one another. Hot. Air. Balloon. Stacey could walk and she could certainly talk — achievements that her parents were told would be very difficult to achieve.

Being the ambassador in 2005 remains a highlight in Stacey's life and she says that KidsAbility will always remain a special part of her life, whether it is as a volunteer or advocate.

Stacey graduated from the Community and Justice Services program at Mohawk College and is enjoying a fulfilling career and living life to its fullest. Down the road, her dreams include living on her own and starting a family.

"All of these things, I could not have done without KidsAbility and the support of my parents. It's kind of scary to think about how I could have been without having gone to KidsAbility."

She overcame everything that she was told that she would never be able to do. "It might have taken me longer to get there, but I did it."



*Stacey* Gorloff

---

Kids Can't Wait Kitchener-Waterloo Ambassador  
2004–2005

# From a Picture Maker to a Smile Maker

If a picture says a thousand words, then certainly Peter Etril Snyder would fill library upon library with his countless works of art that adorn the walls across KidsAbility's sites.

As an artist, Peter calls himself a "picture maker," but at KidsAbility, he is known as a "smile maker."

A former Rotarian, even if only officially for five years, Peter has supported KidsAbility for decades. Of course, back then, Peter knew it as the K-W Rotary Children's Centre and when asked why he started supporting an organization that over time became very near and dear to him, Peter says, "That's lost in the sands of time. The results are obvious."

In all that time, Peter's favourite memory of KidsAbility remains the day he was up on the scaffolding painting the mural in the front lobby of the Waterloo site. A five-year-old boy appeared with his therapist and his mother. He had grown out of his current wheelchair, and the therapist was trying to get him excited about the prospect of a new chair: "You can choose the colour! Do you want a blue one, red one, or green one?" The child was having none of that; all he wanted was another black chair. With that, his mother looked up at Peter and said: "He's going to be an accountant."

“ KidsAbility changes lives. ”

Peter hand-painted each of the murals in the 90's when KidsAbility opened its doors on its newly custom-built site in Waterloo. Each of the 12 years following, Peter donated a painting, specifically for KidsAbility. When KidsAbility was the recipient of a Smilezone at its Waterloo site in 2015, the only things that were not debatable were the murals! When you visit KidsAbility, stop and admire these original pieces that are displayed with love and deep gratitude to Peter for his faithful support over the years.

In 2010, Peter and his wife, Marilyn, established The Peter and Marilyn Snyder Endowment Fund to ensure that more generations of children would have the support that they too would need. In honour of Peter's faithful support, KidsAbility Foundation named Peter the inaugural recipient of The Outstanding Supporter Butterfly Award — an honour given annually for outstanding support of the organization.

KidsAbility is so fortunate to have Peter's unwavering love and support. He says that he hopes the array of ways in which he has donated to KidsAbility is a positive one as he simply claims: "KidsAbility changes lives."



*Peter* Etril Snyder

---

Donor, Past Rotarian and  
2003 Outstanding Supporter Award Recipient



# An Inspiring Tale

The first word that pops into Braden’s mind when he thinks about KidsAbility is “support.”

Coming to KidsAbility for 17 years groomed Braden for his current volunteer role with Spinal Cord Injury Ontario in Hamilton where he mentors individuals who have a newly acquired spinal cord injury.

“When I was 16 months old, my mom and I were in a car accident. All of a sudden all the things I could do, I couldn’t do anymore — things like walking and talking,” Braden says.

Braden was referred to KidsAbility by McMaster Children’s Hospital after the accident. It was here, where people like his therapists Sharon and Carolyn became an integral part of Braden’s childhood, teaching him just about everything. “I gained much mobility, confidence and independence because of them. It was hard work, but they made it fun,” says Braden.

Among the favourite memories Braden has of KidsAbility is when he learned how they made casts for his orthopedic braces most commonly referred to as AFO’s (ankle foot orthosis). He loved to pick out the designs for them.

Braden was named a Kids Can’t Wait Ambassador for 2003–2004. “I loved all the ambassador work. I met so many cool and inspirational people, and other kids my age as I grew up trying to make friends and connections. I shared my story at many events.”

The one thing Braden would tell a new client at KidsAbility is: “Take as much in as you can with what the therapists teach you...it’s an amazing atmosphere there.”

Initially going to Sheridan College for Film & Media, Braden is currently focusing on his health – going to the gym a few times a week and taking part in activities at home. He is thinking about exploring the avenues of writing, poetry or storytelling to inspire others with his story. Other than that, he just wants to travel the world as much as he can.

“ Take as much in as you can with what the therapists teach you... it’s an amazing atmosphere there. ”



*Braden* Martz

Kids Can’t Wait Cambridge Ambassador  
2003–2004

# Hope for the Future

*H*ope. For many families with children with special needs, that is exactly what they receive once they enter the halls of KidsAbility — hope that their children will reach their full potential.

For prospective employees walking through the doors for the first time, it is that atmosphere of optimism that strikes them deeply. Such was the case for a young Lisa Talbot, who was applying for a job at KidsAbility Foundation 17 years ago: “Living in Guelph at the time, I had never heard of the organization. Yet when I walked through the doors for the first time for my interview, I knew there was something special happening at KidsAbility and I wanted to be part of it.”

Lisa began in an entry level role, taking on additional responsibilities over the years before assuming her current position as Executive Director.

Her impact cannot be understated. “It is incredible to look back and see how far we’ve come as an organization thanks to the dedicated efforts of staff, volunteers and board members who have shared their passion to make a difference in children’s lives.”

A great deal of the Foundation’s success can also be attributed to the support of the community. “Without the long-standing support of our community, KidsAbility would look very different today. We are so grateful for the investments that our donors continue to make to empower our children and youth.”

As for Lisa’s vision for the future, she states, “My wish is that all children and youth will one day have all of the supports and interventions they need to realize their potential and that our society embraces the abilities in everyone.”

---

“...I knew there was something special happening at KidsAbility and I wanted to be part of it.”

---



*Lisa Talbot*

---

Executive Director - KidsAbility Foundation



# From Ambassador to Advocate

Eliminating the waiting lists so every child can receive services when they need them is what Caitlin Beacock dreams about. “Kids can’t wait,” says Caitlin. These three words come to mind every time she thinks about KidsAbility. Caitlin knows first-hand just how impactful services can be for a child.

Caitlin’s family brought her to KidsAbility when she was 18 months old. “I had many obstacles to overcome and KidsAbility was there every step of the way providing speech, physio and occupational therapies, and acquiring wheelchairs and modified home and school equipment to make me the independent person I am today.”

Even though at times Caitlin’s determination was tested because of the hard work set in front of her, she looks back and considers moments like her swimming sessions in the pool with her physiotherapist Sharon “good times.” KidsAbility was there for Caitlin along the way including helping her after she had spinal surgery at the age of eight. “The staff continuously kept me going,” remarks Caitlin. “Being named Cambridge’s Ambassador in 2005–2006 was a chance for me to use my voice to speak to the greater community about my journey at KidsAbility. I especially loved when I went and did interviews on TV and radio!”

Even though her role as an official ambassador is over, she now volunteers at KidsAbility’s Cambridge site. “I look at it as a way of being an ambassador and to give back for all the support they’ve given me through the years,” Caitlin says.

As a result of all of her accomplishments at KidsAbility, Caitlin is pursuing post-secondary studies at Carleton University in Ottawa where she aspires to intertwine law and medicine together, and advocate for people with special needs.

“KidsAbility helps you excel,” says Caitlin.

---

“ KidsAbility helps you excel. ”

---



*Caitlin* Beacock

---

Kids Can’t Wait Cambridge Ambassador  
2005–2006 and  
2016 Carol Shantz Bursary Award Recipient

# Just What the Doctor Ordered

Finding a family physician isn't always an easy task. After all, you want someone who cares deeply about your well-being and that of the rest of your family. Dr. Mike Lawrie was such a doctor – and more. He took his desire to help families to another level by volunteering his time in support of children and youth with special needs.

It all began in 1987 with a simple request from the president of the Rotary Club of Cambridge Galt. At that time, the Cambridge Times was looking to partner with local Rotarians to put on a charity run – and Mike was asked to join the committee to organize the event. The recipient of the funds raised was to be none other than the Rotary Children's Centre (which eventually evolved into KidsAbility Centre for Child Development).

For Mike, it was the perfect fit. As a family physician, he had referred some of his young clients to KidsAbility and had seen the remarkable results firsthand. So when it came time to sign on as a committee member of the Cambridge Times Rotary Classic, he did so wholeheartedly.

"I really loved the community involvement," says Mike, "and the way the event focused on neat kids and their families. Rotary and KidsAbility really went out of their way to get children with special needs involved. It was wonderful to see parents pushing children in wheelchairs, youngsters using assisted walking devices and other participants running in support of family members. It became a party and celebration!"

In 1991, after four years as a committee member, Mike became chair and event director – positions he held for 14 years. While he eventually gave up those roles, he stayed on as an advisor and participant. In fact, over three decades of the event, Mike rarely missed a chance to run. One of his fondest memories occurred when he, his wife and daughter all won medals in their respective age categories. Yet, even that paled to the "yearly joys of the kids as they crossed the finish line."

After 30 years, the Cambridge Times Rotary Classic continues to thrive, having raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for KidsAbility – thanks, in part, to tireless advocates like Mike. "I derived great pleasure from volunteering at the run and made some wonderful friendships," he states. "I wanted to do more beyond my medical practice and volunteering made me feel I was helping with a cause that really mattered."

For KidsAbility, Mike was just what the doctor ordered – an individual who cared deeply about the well-being of our children and who went the extra mile to make a difference.



*Dr. Mike* Lawrie

---

Rotarian and Donor



# A Fighting Spirit

Josh was a healthy and active child, until the age of nine when doctors discovered that he had cancer. Doctors saved Josh's life by removing his brain tumour, but the surgery left this once active boy unable to accomplish even the most basic tasks such as sitting up.

"I came to KidsAbility because I had complications from brain tumour surgery; I couldn't walk or talk, so the hospital referred me to KidsAbility," Josh shares.

With the help of KidsAbility's therapists, Josh benefited from physio, occupational and speech therapies at the Cambridge location. He also accessed augmentative communication services to help him find his voice again. He made incredible strides in the five years he was a client. "In one word, I would describe KidsAbility as 'rehabilitation,'" Josh says. Josh knows and appreciates what KidsAbility did for him, and hopes they will continue to grow so more kids will be helped. "KidsAbility helped me overcome my challenges, which in turn allowed me to ride across Canada with my dad. I have really grown as a person because of them."

Being named the 2006–2007 Kids Can't Wait Cambridge Ambassador was a highlight for Josh, something he will always treasure. This opportunity gave him the chance to be a voice for KidsAbility and share his story over and over again, inspiring many people. In 2008, Josh received the Outstanding Supporter Butterfly Award.

In April 2016, Josh graduated from the Advertising and Marketing Program at Conestoga College. He volunteers each summer at Camp Trillium, and at events for the Coast to Coast Against Cancer Foundation. "I hope to continue volunteering while working in an advertising position....and, I would like to get married someday," Josh says with a grin.

---

“ KidsAbility helped me overcome my challenges... ”

---



*Josh Nelson*

---

Kids Can't Wait Cambridge Ambassador  
2006–2007 and  
2008 Outstanding Supporter Award Recipient

# Love into Giving

*M*other Theresa once said, “It’s not how much we give but how much love we put into giving.” For Lynda and John Moseley-Williams, this quote seems particularly apt considering their unconditional love for KidsAbility and their desire to make a significant difference in the lives of children and youth with special needs.

Lynda’s connection to KidsAbility began in 1990 – the year she first began volunteering at the organization. Twenty-seven years later, she still loves helping children and finds fulfillment in the work she does with teachers in the classroom:

“KidsAbility is a place that is so full of love, where we think of each child as one of our own. Personally, I’m inspired by the dedication of everyone here and the immeasurable impact the teachers have on those who come in for assistance.”

The impact of KidsAbility became even more evident to the couple when some family, McDonald’s staff members’ children and neighbourhood kids all received help from KidsAbility for their particular needs. It was a turning point for John and he came to the conclusion that “every child deserves a chance to reach his or her full potential.”

As a previous owner of five McDonald’s, John and other owners have actively supported KidsAbility. In fact, McDonald’s restaurants in the region have supported KidsAbility for well over 30 years via McHappy Day proceeds and other direct donations. “KidsAbility is well recognized as an outstanding organization,” states John. “No one challenges the need to benefit such a great agency.”

With the support of their children, accountant and legal team, Lynda and John also decided to leave a legacy gift in their wills to assist generations of clients to come. Two of their children had volunteered at KidsAbility and witnessed the benefit children with special needs receive, allowing them to rise to their full potential.

John and Lynda took things even further when the couple sold their McDonald’s restaurants and made a substantial donation to KidsAbility. “When you witness the work KidsAbility does firsthand, it really touches you,” states Lynda.

“They truly rise to their maximum potential – something that wouldn’t happen if they weren’t offered the chance at KidsAbility.”

Twenty-seven years after the couple first started supporting KidsAbility, the Moseley-Williamses continue to put their love into giving – something greatly appreciated by every child impacted by their generosity.



*John & Lynda*  
Moseley-Williams

---

Donors and Volunteers



# Making Dreams a Reality

Claire Stultz has run through the halls of KidsAbility. While that may not seem unusual, it is quite extraordinary. When she was born, her parents were told that she may never walk.

Her mother, Leanne, had always dreamed of having a little girl; dreams that included dance recitals and watching her go off to her first day of school. Claire was born with Mosaic Trisomy 22, a rare disorder that causes her cells to have extra chromosomes. Those dreams were put on hold as not only had her parents been told that she may never walk, but Claire's disorder also meant that she had other challenges ahead such as a heart defect, a hearing impairment and was at risk for future developmental delays. Claire was referred to KidsAbility when she was six months old.

"The support, knowledge and encouragement of everyone at KidsAbility have benefited not only Claire but all of our family. When we first came to KidsAbility we were terrified. They gave us hope for her and stressed all the things that Claire was able to do," says Leanne. Working with the therapists at KidsAbility in Guelph, Claire learned how to sit, walk, eat on her own and run!

"When I was born the doctors told my parents that I wouldn't be able to do anything," says Claire. "I went for lots of therapy and now I can do everything another girl my age can do."

Claire's family didn't envision that when their little girl was born that she would have so many challenges ahead of her. They also didn't imagine that KidsAbility would play such a pivotal role in helping Claire to realize her dreams. Giving back to the organization meant a lot to the Stultz Family. Claire's father, Ray, served on KidsAbility's Board of Directors in 2010 after serving as the Kids Can't Wait Guelph-Wellington Ambassadors the year prior.

"I go to school, I do cheerleading and horseback riding. I can do almost everything by myself because of the help that KidsAbility gave me. Things were hard for me and they are hard for some other kids too. I have some special needs though I like to say I am just special. All kids are special and if they need help they should get it like I did."

---

“When we first came to KidsAbility we were terrified. They gave us hope for her and stressed all the things that Claire was able to do.”

---



*Stultz* Family

---

Kids Can't Wait Guelph-Wellington Ambassadors  
2008–2009

# Working Towards a Brighter Future

Hope. Simply put, this is what KidsAbility has meant to the Brown family over the years for their daughter Sydney.

Born with a rare chromosomal disorder called Monosomy 18p -, Sydney was hypotonic meaning that she was unable to move her arms or her legs. Her parents, Jim and Charmaine, brought her to KidsAbility when Sydney was referred at only two months of age. Goals were established for her so that her muscles would develop to allow her to reach for toys, learn how to crawl and, eventually, learn how to walk. Through the support of Sydney's family and her team of occupational, physio, speech and language therapists, feeding clinics, dietician and therapeutic recreation, her family has celebrated each and every milestone that she has achieved. Sydney is a spirited young lady who still benefits from KidsAbility's as Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) and augmentative communication services (ACS) to help provide her with the tools she needs to live a richer and more inclusive life.

The Brown's describe their connection with KidsAbility's therapists as family. With a true heart for the work being done in the lives of the children and families KidsAbility serves, Charmaine couldn't resist the opportunity to parlay that passion into her career. As a member of KidsAbility Foundation's team, she works with donors to fund new and current programs and services that benefit children and youth with special needs. She knows first-hand the impact that the right service at the right time can have for each child.

"KidsAbility is an extended part of our family," says Charmaine. "It gave us hope and helped our family to realize that we were not alone. KidsAbility's services have had a huge and positive impact not just in Sydney's life, but for our entire family. Working with donors to fund these incredible programs to benefit our kids makes me so proud to see what we can achieve together."

---

“ KidsAbility is an extended part of our family. ”

---



*Brown* Family

---

Kids Can't Wait Guelph-Wellington Ambassadors  
2009–2010 and  
Staff - KidsAbility Foundation



# Sharing in New Beginnings

Every day at KidsAbility School is a new adventure for both students and staff including Educational Assistant Kitty Stahle.

Kitty is most proud of the self-esteem that she helps nurture in each student — something that she has been doing since beginning her own journey as a member of KidsAbility School's staff in 2000.

"I chose to work here (after first volunteering for five years) because I believe in KidsAbility School's mission," says Kitty. "KidsAbility School supports full acceptance. I feel privileged to be a part of an experienced support system which aids our students in achieving their success."

Over the years, there have been many successes that Kitty has had the opportunity to witness. Choosing one specific moment as a favourite is difficult. A favourite memory, for Kitty, is one that repeats itself annually when staff welcome fresh, young, smiling faces into the classrooms.

With each new student comes new adventures and the opportunity to share in new beginnings with families, and to witness the expressions of excitement and hope in anticipation for their child's achievements.

"It's hard not to feel all things are possible in this incredibly positive atmosphere that's throughout the building. Just stand in the hallways of the school and you'll quickly see when you are welcomed with a smile," Kitty says.

As Kitty knows, the open communication with families is something that is an incredibly important part of each child's journey as a family plays a critical role on their child's team of care. This open communication helps to develop relationships that are rich in support, knowledge, experience, understanding and hope. Kitty adds that for children, the opportunity to be "just a kid" is a beautiful, wonderful thing!

“I feel privileged to be a part of an experienced support system which aids our students in achieving their success.”



*Kitty* Stahle

Education Assistant -  
KidsAbility School Authority

# The Winds of Change

It was 2003 and change was in the air. The K-W Rotary Children's Centre was faced with a number of significant challenges and needed strong leadership to steward it through this transitional period.

The Centre Board, led by Bob Blowes (Chair at the time), was faced with the unenviable task of renaming the K-W Rotary Children's Centre – an organization that people in the community had come to recognize and embrace. As Bob noted at the time, "This initiative was required for two reasons – a legal requirement of Rotary International that we discontinue using 'Rotary' in our name and our need to more fully identify our role and purpose to a wider constituency."

The process was difficult, as local Rotarians closely identified with the Centre. However a committee was formed from the Centre, Foundation and School Boards and they worked together to ensure the success of this major rebranding initiative. After much thought and discussion, "KidsAbility Centre for Child Development" was chosen as the new name – and the organization hasn't looked back since.

Eventually, Bob moved to the Foundation – which several years earlier was given a new charge. Originally, the Foundation (entirely made up of volunteers) was the trustee of funds that had accumulated in excess of current needs. However, as Bob states, "It was decided that the Foundation would become very active in fundraising outside of the Rotary Clubs and that the name change could support a broader appeal for funds." With this new mandate in place, the Foundation continued to increase its fundraising totals on a yearly basis. In fact, in 2016, over \$2 million was generated through its various initiatives.

Bob originally served the Centre as the representative of the Rotary Club of Kitchener, where he was Treasurer for several years. Eventually he joined the executive of the Centre Board and served as its Chair and Past Chair. Bob continued to serve the Centre as a member of the executive of the Foundation and its Treasurer for several years.

For his efforts, Bob received the Elaine Ormston Outstanding Butterfly Award – an acknowledgment of his contributions made even more special as his 85-year-old parents were in attendance to share this proud moment.

Today, it's hard to imagine where we would be without the work of people like Bob – a true leader who helped shepherd KidsAbility through momentous changes during his tenure as Chair at KidsAbility and as Treasurer at KidsAbility Foundation.



*Bob* Blowes

---

Volunteer, Rotarian and  
2010 Elaine Ormston  
Outstanding Butterfly Award Recipient



# Crowning Achievements

Did you know that the 46th Miss Oktoberfest is an alumna of KidsAbility? It's true!

Lindsay Kalbfleisch had a viral infection in her brain when she was 18 months old, which resulted in partial paralysis of her right side. Lindsay's family, referred by their doctor, walked through the doors of KidsAbility to receive both physio and occupational therapies to strengthen her right side. KidsAbility was a part of Lindsay's life from the age of two until she was six. "I felt KidsAbility was a safe, welcoming and empowering place for me to try new things, make mistakes and realize my potential," shares Lindsay.

Throughout her time at KidsAbility, she recalls working with her occupational therapist, Susan, using bingo dabbers by placing them in her weaker hand to dab. "I remember it was very frustrating, but Susan always did her best to make it fun and engaging for me," remarks Lindsay. "I learned to do everything my friends were doing, so I could play alongside them without feeling held back."

The role KidsAbility played for her family was huge — the staff gave them hope and allowed Lindsay's parents to be parents and not therapists. To this day, Lindsay appreciates the diversity of the services offered at KidsAbility. Each child that comes to KidsAbility is celebrated for being unique, and KidsAbility tailors each plan of care to the needs of the child. Knowing this, she encourages parents of children using KidsAbility services to "Believe in the process. You have no idea how far your child will go."

Lindsay holds a Master's degree from the University of Waterloo and is currently the Innovation Manager and Project Coordinator at the Postmedia Innovation Outpost in Downtown Kitchener. She continues to engage in the community through Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest and other not-for-profit organizations.

Lindsay shares she is "confident that KidsAbility will continue to be a prominent organization in the community in years to come."

---

“ You have no idea how far your child will go. ”

---



*Lindsay* Kalbfleisch

---

Alumna and Miss Oktoberfest 2014

# Growing Guelph

Denise Watson was a newly minted speech-language pathologist from the University of Toronto when she first applied for a job at the Rotary Centre in 1987. After a shift in plans, she decided to accept a job up north instead. Two years later, Denise's path took her back to Waterloo Region and, again, she applied for a role at the Rotary Centre.

Arriving early for her interview, Denise remembers introducing herself to Mary Helen, KidsAbility's friendly receptionist. As they were striking up a conversation, before she knew it, Denise was caught up in the commotion of what was a typical day at the bustling Rotary Centre. A staff lunch party was going on with some serious shenanigans, including something that sounded like a human whistle! At the same time, the school bus had arrived with the children for their afternoon classes and thinking that Denise was a class volunteer, the bus driver plopped not one but two children onto her lap!

She laughs: "Mary Helen kept an eye on me and gave me a wink of good luck as I walked past her. I delivered my kids to their classroom and then proceeded to the interview room, which was a homemade library with seriously sloping walls!"

The interview was a success and 28 years later, Denise looks back and smiles on this initial and unique introduction to an organization that she has been proud to call home.

"I have had the privilege of working in many roles at KidsAbility, with many special kids and families, alongside amazing staff! There have been hard times and less-than-great days, but always the life, hope and promise of the place has remained."

As KidsAbility looked for opportunities to expand its services and sites to better meet the needs of a growing community, Denise found herself at the beginning of a significant chapter in the organization's history: a pilot project to create a team dedicated to serving the children, youth and families of Guelph-Wellington. The pilot proved to be a success and permanent funding and space was secured. Bringing services as close to families as possible remained a priority

for KidsAbility. Each time a new service was added, or new space was acquired to meet the needs of the children in Guelph-Wellington, Denise was at the centre of it all.

"KidsAbility has a life all its own and I am proud to have been part of it – shenanigans and all."

No matter what site Denise worked from or what role she has had, one thing remained constant: Denise is a passionate champion of the children and youth with special needs in our community.



*Denise* Watson

---

Staff - KidsAbility



# Community Champion for Children

Vikki Dupuis had heard about KidsAbility being in a space in the Victoria Road Recreation Centre in Guelph, but she didn't know a lot about the organization that would one day take on a personal meaning for her family.

"It wasn't until we (City of Guelph) were opening the West End Community Centre in 2001 that I really understood the work of KidsAbility," says Vikki, who managed the West End Centre. Knowing the many benefits of a site that was co-located, having experienced this in Cambridge at the Chaplin Family Y, KidsAbility embarked upon this partnership for enhanced space in order to provide services to a growing number of families in the Guelph community. Vikki became a champion of the work and the children of KidsAbility.

"When we opened the West End, we didn't know that there weren't relationships like this in other communities and I remember Denise (Program Manager for KidsAbility's Guelph services at the time) saying in one of our many, many discussions that this would be a more 'normal' day for kids who generally spent a lot of time in hospitals. They could come to the Centre for treatment and perhaps go to the library, maybe an open swim, maybe a drop in program and, oh by the way, we'll do an hour of therapy too. That really struck me."

One of Vikki's favourite memories over the years was watching a little girl who was weaving back and forth as she struggled to walk down the hall. "I asked the therapist what she was doing and she replied: 'Walking the cracks!' Apparently that was her incentive for practising her walking! I laughed out loud and said: 'Trust a child to find the silver lining when all the adults could only see cracks.'"

In July 2010, Vikki's son Matthew and daughter-in-law Tracy welcomed a daughter, Eloise, born prematurely at only 24 weeks and a mere 1.5 pounds. Eloise, or Ella as her family affectionately calls her, was discharged after six months at McMaster's NIC Unit and immediately referred to KidsAbility. Vikki hadn't imagined that her family would need the services that she had helped to strengthen for other families in Guelph.

"KidAbility gave Ella the tools and encouragement to tackle every opportunity. She plays T-ball, takes karate, plays soccer and got skates for Christmas! Nothing and no one stops my Ella," says Vikki.

Out of this "match made in heaven" partnership, programs such as adapted aquatics, training for camp staff and a host of other supports to increase accessible programming have blossomed. As a result, children and youth with special needs and their families, families like Vikki's, can live more inclusive and active lives and have access to world-class care in their own community.



*Vikki* Dupuis

---

Community Partner and Donor

# An Outstanding Supporter

For some people, volunteering is an important part of their lives. In the case of Elaine Ormston, it's quite simply part of her DNA.

Over the years, Elaine has spent countless hours lending her expertise to various organizations. Yet today, she can claim with all confidence, "KidsAbility is where I want to be. This is a very special place."

Elaine's start at KidsAbility coincided with the opening of the organization's ground-breaking facility in 1995. However, it came about in an unexpected way: "My husband Charlie was asked by Steve Cameron to join the KidsAbility Board," Elaine explains. "Charlie was too busy, but he said he knew somebody who would be a good candidate. I was the second choice."

While Elaine became a member of the KidsAbility Board, she also wanted to leverage the experience she had garnered over the years as a young candy-striper and a registered nurse specializing in pediatrics and orthopedics at Grand River Hospital. KidsAbility School proved to be a perfect fit.

Today, Elaine still relishes the volunteer time she spends with the children — and the difference one can make in the life of a child. "I remember one boy who had difficulty rolling over," she states. "Most children learn this very early in life, but he was three years old and struggling. He'd practise and practise and practise on a mat. When he finally achieved his goal, everyone was so excited and cheered on this great accomplishment! This is a place where miracles — however small — happen every day."

Elaine went on to have an impact as a Board member too. When it became clear that fundraising needed to play a more significant role in supporting KidsAbility's initiatives, she and John Lynch started the KidsAbility Foundation Board. After two years with John at the helm, Elaine assumed the Chair of the Foundation. Eventually, she became Chair of the Endowment Fund Campaign, which has raised nearly \$10 million to date.

In 2009, Elaine received KidsAbility Foundation's highest commendation: The Outstanding Supporter Butterfly Award. Then to further recognize her ongoing contributions and dedicated support, the award was renamed in her honour. While Elaine may have been "second choice" 22 years ago, there is no doubt that she would be everyone's first choice today.



*Elaine Ormston*

---

Volunteer, Donor and  
2009 Outstanding Supporter Award Recipient



# Preparing for School Success

For Bonnie Bremner, the start of each new school year meant new opportunities to help the children at KidsAbility School prepare for success.

From 2001 to 2008, Bonnie served as KidsAbility School's principal. "When Carol Shantz was planning to retire as principal, I was encouraged to apply for her position. My past experience working with therapists from KidsAbility in my schools in the Waterloo Region District School Board was amazing, so I knew this was a good fit," reflects Bonnie. "It was a wonderful opportunity and an extremely rewarding experience in my career in education."

In 2003, the K-W Rotary Children's Centre underwent a name change. Creating a new name for the Centre that also honoured the history of the Rotarians and the K-W Rotary Children's Centre was a memorable time for Bonnie.

The hope of continued sustainability for KidsAbility to meet the needs of children within Waterloo Region and Guelph-Wellington, while providing easy and timely services to families, hits home for Bonnie.

"My grandson received speech therapy at KidsAbility. Even though I was familiar with the services through the eyes as KidsAbility School principal, and now trustee, I had a new perspective seeing it through the eyes of his parents, and my eyes as a grandmother."

Bonnie is most proud of the dedicated and caring staff who work as a team with their expertise and innovation and most importantly how the School and KidsAbility's therapists, staff and volunteers work together in preparing children for school success. She simply says: "KidsAbility is an invaluable gem for families in our community".

---

“ KidsAbility is an invaluable gem for families in our community. ”

---



*Bonnie* Bremner

---

Principal - KidsAbility School Authority  
2001–2008, Donor and  
Current Chair - KidsAbility School Authority

# The Model of Giving

A strong role model can make all the difference during a child's formative years. For Bob Grant, his father Roy set the standard as a Charter member of the Mount Forest Lions Club and by serving his community in humanitarian needs.

Bob followed suit and joined the Fergus Rotary Club in 1975. He welcomed the opportunity to join an organization that valued "Service Above Self." In the beginning, Bob and other members helped children with special needs by driving them to a community therapeutic centre in Guelph – "a moving experience" where Rotarians and children shared "songs, laughs and tears."

When Bob became president of Rotary in June 2000, he felt a change of direction was required. In his president's message to members, he stated, "I am very excited about our recent initiative to create a Rotary Children's Centre in Centre Wellington with doors to open September 2000. This facility will serve pre-schoolers with disabilities and operate as a referral pivot for their parents."

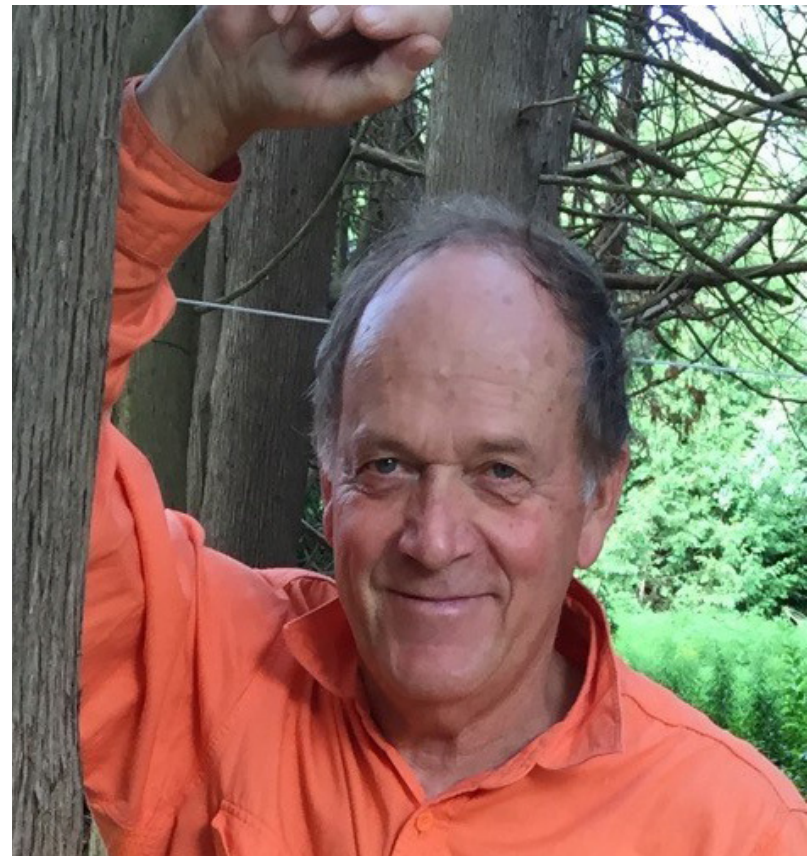
Together with the Rotary Children's Centre CEO, Stephen Swatridge, a plan was devised where Fergus Rotary would raise \$75,000 over three years to establish the new facility. Bob then proceeded to approach the Mount Forest Lions Club about opening a satellite office. "I was taping on the goodwill of my father," notes Bob. "Fortunately, the Lions agreed to provide funds and a space to see children there. Today, kids are still receiving services in Mount Forest."

Over time, the Fergus site has moved and been renovated to meet the current needs of the children. For Bob, he still feels proud of his contributions: "Everyone who gets referred to KidsAbility thinks so highly of it. For me personally, I'm pleased that I was involved in kickstarting KidsAbility in Fergus and Mount Forest."

---

“ For me personally,  
I'm pleased that I was involved in  
kickstarting KidsAbility in  
Fergus and Mount Forest. ”

---



*Bob Grant*

---

Rotarian



# Following Her Dreams

When Lauren Davidson was born, her parents, Caroline and Don, were told of all the things Lauren would never be able to do because she had Down syndrome. Her parents were given a bleak outlook of her future; they felt unprepared and alone.

At seven months old, Lauren was referred to KidsAbility by a community agency in Guelph. "When we came to KidsAbility, I felt that the people here truly cared and made us feel positive about what Lauren could accomplish...and accomplish she has! Lauren is a dancer, a baker, a singer, a baseball player, crafter extraordinaire, a friend and a hard worker," says Caroline.

Lauren's biggest accomplishment at KidsAbility was her perseverance in training her large muscles in preparation for walking. "The physiotherapy sessions were tough, but her physiotherapist was tougher!" laughs Caroline. Although most of her therapy was fun and happy, there were many tears and much frustration. In contrast, Lauren loved her occupational therapy sessions growing up (especially the crafts) and had no idea she was "working"! Lauren endured many sessions and continued to work on goals at home. With the help of her therapists, Lauren accomplished and reached many goals in a short time through hard work and determination.

"My favourite memory is the celebration we had when Lauren, after three years of intense physical therapy at KidsAbility, started to walk. I remember calling her physiotherapist to tell her while watching my daughter walk little circles around me, unaided. It was a profound moment of elation and feeling like this particular mountain has been climbed. It was the realization that she will have many more mountains to cross, but I knew then that her journey meant patience and perseverance to get there," remarks Caroline.

Without the support of KidsAbility's therapists and donors who support this work, Caroline firmly believes that Lauren would not be where she is today. When the opportunity to work for the organization that played such a pivotal role in Lauren's and her family's lives came up, it was something that Caroline jumped at.

Lauren is following her dreams and aspires to go to college, to have a job in a daycare and to live in her own apartment independently. Caroline shares those same hopes for Lauren. "I hope that all of the hard therapeutic work she was fortunate to receive at KidsAbility and to practise at home will provide her with the tools needed to reach her goal of working and living independently."

For Caroline, when she thinks of KidsAbility, she remembers the hope that she received so many years ago when a future this bright for Lauren hadn't seemed possible.



*Lauren Davidson &  
Caroline Davidson*

---

Kids Can't Wait Guelph-Wellington Ambassadors  
2010–2011 and  
Staff - KidsAbility 2002–2017

# Meant to Be

Opportunity — to achieve meaningful goals, experience childhood, develop new skills while feeling unconditional acceptance, support and encouragement — are all critical parts of what KidsAbility does in Kellie Bell's eyes.

In 1997, a close friend of Kellie's was a swim volunteer at the K-W Rotary Children's Centre and continuously relayed to Kellie, who at the time, was teaching in Rodney, Ontario, about how wonderful the organization was. When Kellie decided to move back to Waterloo Region, she applied for a position and was hired the day she moved back to Waterloo. "I always felt that this job was meant to be!" says Kellie.

Kellie began working at the school before she had her own children, but as it turned out, both of her children received services at KidsAbility. Her daughter (now a volunteer) and her son have developed attitudes of acceptance, empathy and inclusion for all, and both desire to find careers in this field. Kellie says, "The children at KidsAbility School are the greatest teachers."

Kellie has had many roles at KidsAbility School. She teaches an afternoon junior kindergarten class, she is a liaison teacher providing programming to children who are unable to attend school for a period of time due to medical reasons, and she is a consultant to teachers and educational assistants in the co-terminus school boards who require strategies for students who are KidsAbility School graduates. As well, Kellie works with KidsAbility's augmentative communication services (ACS) to assess and provide support and strategies to families.

"I enjoy every aspect of my job. It has become inextricably linked with my day-to-day life where some of my closest friends are families of former students," she says.

---

“ The children at  
KidsAbility School are the  
greatest teachers. ”

---



*Kellie* Bell

---

Teacher -  
KidsAbility School Authority



# Passing the Torch

As a baby, Graydon Large seemed very healthy. As time progressed, he began missing milestones. His parents, Deirdre and Peter, took him to the pediatrician since he had difficulty holding his head up, sitting and crawling. Although Graydon didn't have an official diagnosis, he was referred to KidsAbility. Diagnosis or not, Graydon's team of therapists knew exactly what to do to help him to begin to work on realizing his milestones.

"Fortunately for Graydon, he was able to start therapy right away at KidsAbility when he was one and a half years old," says Deirdre. Through physio and occupational therapies, Graydon became stronger and worked his way up to sitting in a wheelchair. Through speech therapy, he learned how to communicate clearly, and through Early Childhood Education, KidsAbility School and programs and camps like Arts Express, Graydon flourished.

"I was in a wheelchair, and I wanted to get out of the wheelchair," Graydon shares. His therapists worked with Graydon on building the skills and strength that he would need to achieve that goal. By Grade 5, Graydon was walking independently and donated his wheelchair — because he didn't need it anymore.

*"We had the very best services for Graydon right here at KidsAbility."*

Deirdre's favourite memory took place during Arts Express camp. "The first year Graydon came out on stage at Arts Express walking by himself is by far my favourite. I was bawling!"

As he grew older, Graydon challenged himself constantly participating in The Downtown MudPuppy Chase (completing the three-kilometre course with a walker) and the Trigator Triathlon (an amazing feat that involves swimming, biking and running). He also went from being a participant at Arts Express to a counsellor. "I loved being a counsellor since I could help out children," Graydon states.

In June 2015, Graydon was named an official torchbearer for the Toronto Pan Am Games. "We were so excited to watch our son Graydon carry the torch," notes Deirdre. "Graydon has come so far, using a wheelchair, walker and now walking independently. We were so proud of him, representing KidsAbility, I was in tears. We hope he inspires others to reach beyond their comfort zone and pursue new adventures."

There was a time when the Large family was going to move to Burlington, but in the end decided to stay. "We had the very best services for Graydon right here at KidsAbility," says Deirdre.



*Graydon Large*

Kids Can't Wait Kitchener-Waterloo Ambassador  
2011–2012

# A Man of Many Talents

When it comes to Tom Jeary, there seems to be no end to his many talents. As a pilot in the Canadian Air Force, he tested F-86s in Germany; in the financial services industry, he proved to be a successful executive; and as a Rotarian, he used his engineering background to dramatically impact the lives of children in need.

The turning point of Tom's life occurred in the early 1970s, when he took a tour of the Mackay Institute in Montreal as a local Rotary member. "It was there that I saw children with spina bifida or other forms of paralysis either strapped into an adult wheelchair or left lying on a mat," he explains. "There was really nothing to help them." That's what propelled Tom to take action.

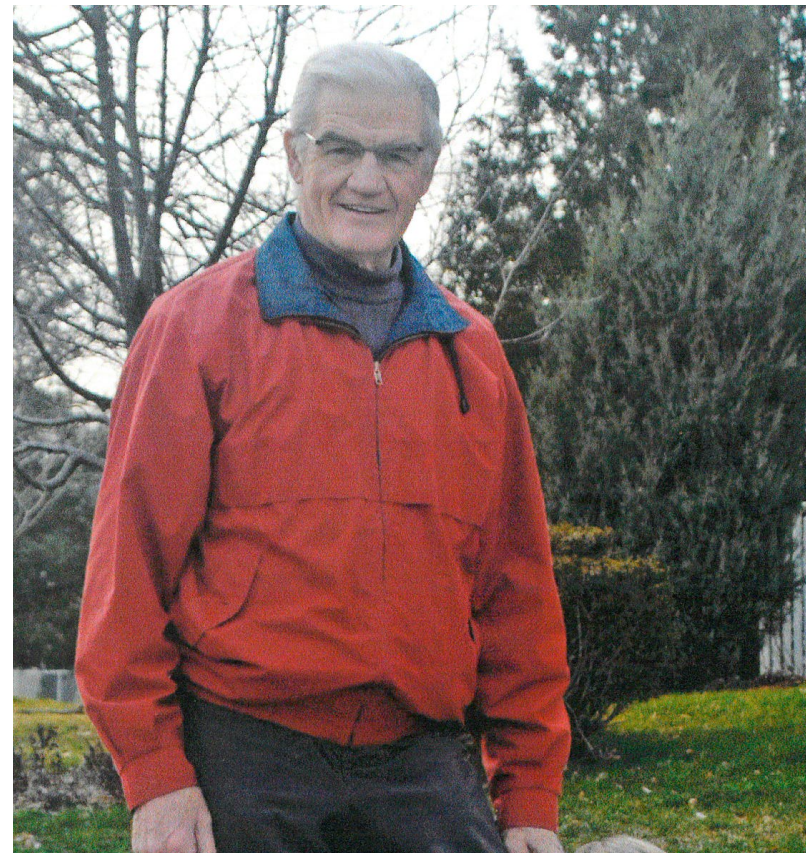
A trained engineer who "loves problem-solving," he set out to create miniature wheelchairs. Using his "handyman background," he built 11 modified wheelchairs for kids at the Mackay Institute. That was just the start of things to come.

For nearly five decades, he has adapted existing devices or created entirely new "gadgets" that allow individuals to do things once thought impossible. And when Tom moved to Waterloo region, he lent his skills to KidsAbility. Using his "gadgetry engineering," he has helped over 200 children with special needs throughout the many stages of their lives.

Yet Tom's support of KidsAbility doesn't end there. He was also inspired to create a children's book called *The Chipmunk Fall Fair* — starring a photogenic chipmunk called Chester.

To get interesting visuals for the story, Tom built miniature props that he strategically placed peanut butter on. When Chester came to dine on the peanut butter, Tom took pictures that made it seem that Chester was playing with the items. Next time you are at KidsAbility, stop by the Foundation and pick up a copy of Tom's book and see first-hand his creativity at work!

To date, Tom has raised more than \$12,000 for KidsAbility from the sale of *The Chipmunk Fall Fair*. As for Chester, he has received a steady supply of peanuts for his hand in supporting KidsAbility.



*Tom Jeary*

---

Rotarian, Donor and Volunteer



# Finding His Voice

Born without any complications, Michael Papaioannou was a happy baby with lots of energy. When he was six months old, his parents, Peter and Melissa, noticed that he wasn't able to sit up by himself or hold a bottle like many children his age. He was referred to KidsAbility and since eight months of age, Michael's incredible smile and positive, determined attitude are just a couple of the many reasons why he has endeared himself to everyone who has the pleasure of spending even a few minutes with him.

Michael was diagnosed with Lesch-Nyhan Disease (LND). LND is a rare disease and as his parents were trying to learn what this diagnosis would mean for Michael, therapists came alongside Peter and Melissa to help them learn how to become advocates for their son, how to work with him at home and to let them know that they were not alone.

"KidsAbility helped Michael, but they also helped me," says Melissa. "I wouldn't be where I am today without them, and Michael definitely wouldn't either."

Preschool, camps, physiotherapy, occupational and recreation therapies are just a handful of the programs and services that Michael has benefited from at KidsAbility. For Michael, his greatest personal achievement was found in augmentative communication services where he found his voice.

Michael is non-verbal but can clearly communicate through his Maestro — technology that he has learned to use at KidsAbility. Therapists taught Michael how to utilize his speech generating device to articulate everything that he wants or needs to say. This level of independence is something that Michael will continue to master as he grows.

As Melissa thinks back to their early days at KidsAbility, she recalls a specific therapy session with Michael's occupational therapist at the time, Susan. She watched as Susan's determination and patience with Michael confirmed that they were exactly in the right place to help him succeed.

"They cared about him just as much as I did and wanted him to reach his full potential," says Melissa of KidsAbility's staff. "They've given us a life and a future that is fantastic."

Melissa's passion to help build an inclusive community for every child makes her an invaluable advocate as a member of KidsAbility's Board as well as on the Family Advisory Council for Ontario Association of Children's Rehabilitation Services (OACRS).

"My biggest hope for Michael is to be happy. I want him to be fulfilled, be happy with who he is and what he can accomplish, and what he has accomplished."



*Michael Papaioannou &  
Melissa Papaioannou*

Kids Can't Wait Kitchener-Waterloo Ambassador  
2013–2014  
and KidsAbility Board Member



# 2010's

## 2011

To better serve children and families in Kitchener, in June, KidsAbility opens a new 5,200-square-foot site inside The Family Centre located at 65 Hanson Avenue in Kitchener.

## 2012

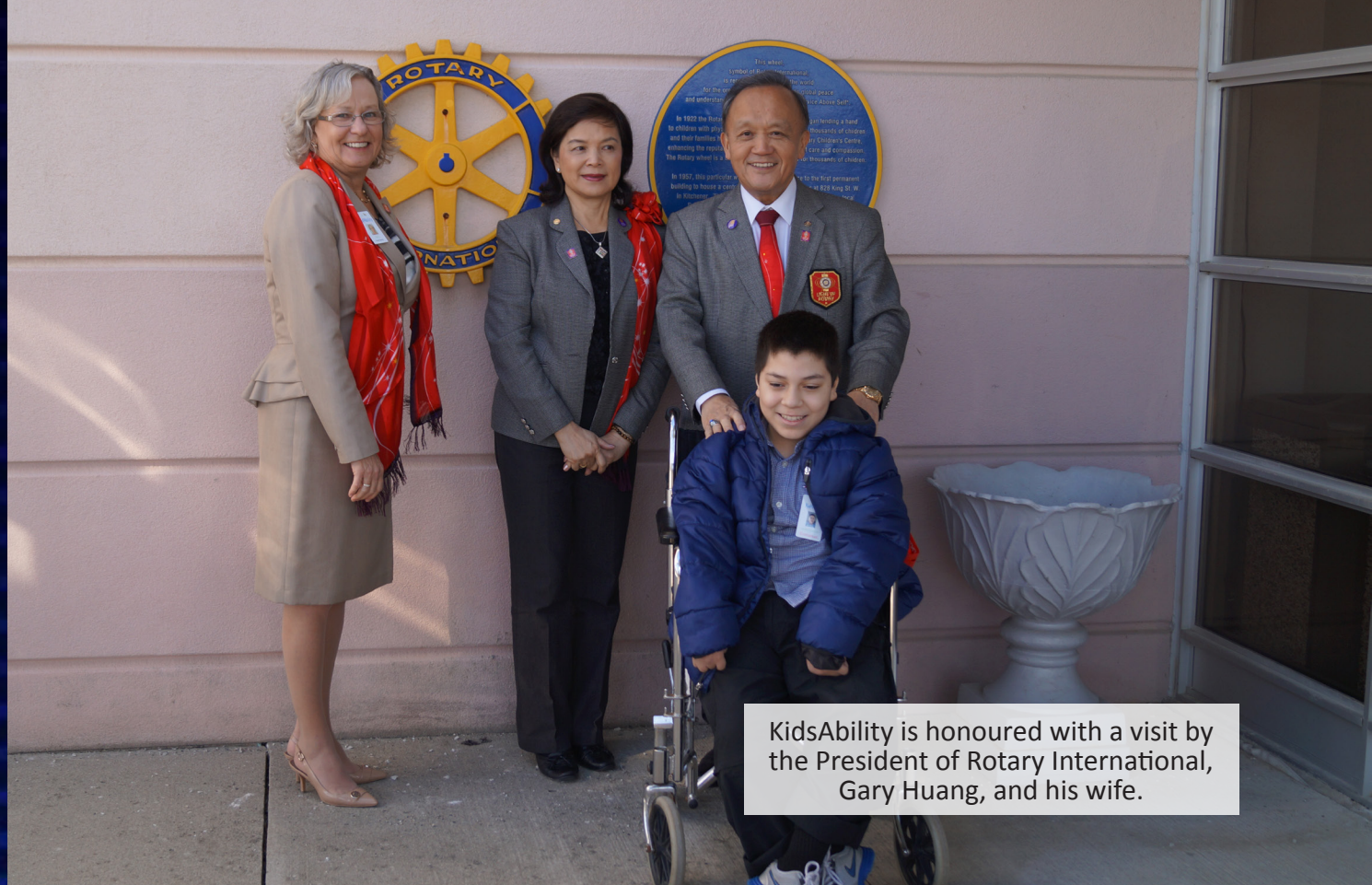
KidsAbility, alongside 11 other children's treatment centres, implements leading-edge technology known as GoldCare. Thanks to a one-time grant of \$2.5 million from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, this new system allows for multidisciplinary teams to conduct a team assessment, develop an integrated plan of care, share important information, view clinical notes and monitor each child's and family's progress.

## 2013

In March, KidsAbility is awarded Exemplary Standing through Accreditation Canada, the highest accreditation possible, recognizing our commitment to excellence in governance, leadership and client services.

After 27 years at the helm, KidsAbility bids farewell to chief executive officer, Stephen Swatridge, and welcomes Linda Kenny in April.

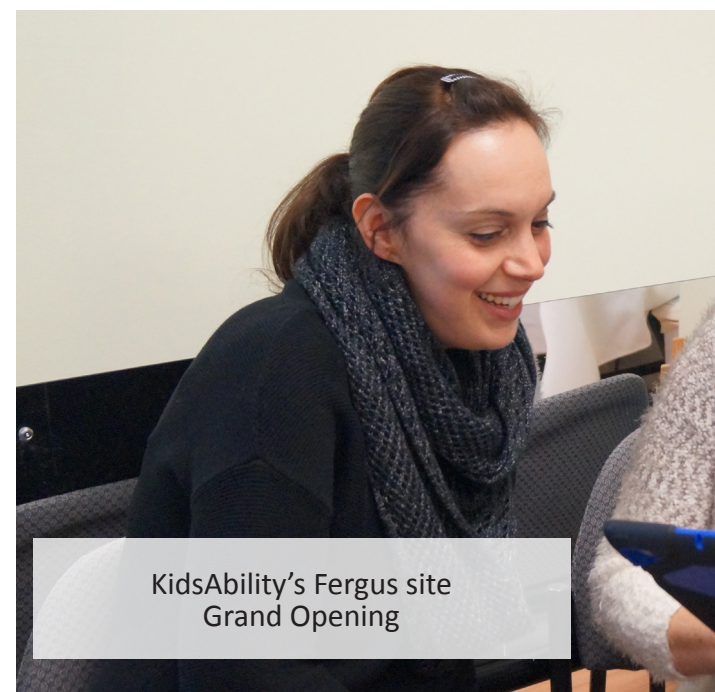
Through an increase in funding from the province, KidsAbility launches Spark!. This program provides brief and rapid intervention to children with mild to moderate needs who otherwise may age out of the system. This program helps to move 293 children off the waiting list.



KidsAbility is honoured with a visit by the President of Rotary International, Gary Huang, and his wife.



Supported by his physiotherapist, occupational therapist and mother, Michael reaches his goal of rock climbing.



KidsAbility's Fergus site Grand Opening







Go Baby Go!



iCan Bike



Sibling Support



KidsAbility School



KidsAbility's Centre for Autism  
Grand Opening in Kitchener

## 2014

On March 23, KidsAbility is honoured to host the President of Rotary International, Gary C. K. Huang, and his wife.

KidsAbility officially opens our new Centre for Autism in Kitchener on March 31. This purpose-built space is designed specifically for children with autism and welcomes community partners Waterloo Region Family Network, Autism Services Waterloo Region, Facile and Extend-a-Family.

On November 10, KidsAbility celebrates the opening of its newest dedicated autism site benefiting our children and families in Cambridge. Located on Langs Drive, the new facility is custom-built to meet the needs of our complex children.

A pilot program to provide speech services for our complex clients in Guelph launches in partnership with WeeTalk.

## 2015

Families are joined in January by members of the Rotary Club of Fergus-Elora, staff, volunteers and community partners to cut the ribbon a new custom-built space to better serve the over 100 children who benefit from services offered by KidsAbility in Fergus.

In May, the Vulnerable Persons Registry launches. KidsAbility is a proud partner in this community initiative that equips police with valuable information in a crisis.

Stay and Play, a program developed in Guelph-Wellington through a partnership with KidsAbility and St. Joe's, expands across Ontario in December.



# Family-Centred Care

Zdenka Uddin is forever grateful to McMaster Children's Hospital for referring their family to KidsAbility. "If it wasn't for KidsAbility, Mishi would not be here today," confidently says Zdenka. "In one word, KidsAbility means 'miracles.'"

Mishi came to KidsAbility's Fergus site with a host of challenges. Although his parents were not aware of the extent of the help that Mishi would need, his therapists Donna and Doreen immediately stepped in and began physio and occupational therapies. "Mishi's therapists have helped him with virtually everything from eating, walking, toileting and speaking," says Zdenka.

During an appointment at KidsAbility when Mishi was 2 ½ months old, Zdenka shared the devastating news with his therapist that Mishi was battling yet another complication, a battle that this time his little body would not win. Mishi's therapist Donna thought that just maybe it was something else, something that she had encountered before. His therapist was right and because of her knowledge and instincts, Mishi received surgery that ultimately saved his life.

The Uddin's loved being the ambassadors in 2012—2013 and sharing their family's story with everyone in the community.

KidsAbility's family-centred approach to care made a big impact for Zdenka and her family. "I really appreciated that when Mishi received therapy home visits Donna and Doreen would always bring toys for our daughter, Alina, so she didn't feel left out. Before therapy would start, I would always be asked how I was doing emotionally, if there was anything I wanted to talk about. They considered and took care of Mishi's other family members as well," Zdenka shares.

"You're in good hands," is what Zdenka would relay to a family new to KidsAbility.

Currently, Mishi attends J. Douglas Public School. He is in a mainstream class and keeps up with his peers in a modified way. Mishi loves to play hockey and soccer, to read books, swimming, and his dog, Jade.

---

“ In one word,  
KidsAbility means ‘miracles.’ ”

---



*Mishi* Uddin

---

Kids Can't Wait Guelph-Wellington Ambassador  
2012–2013



# “Swimming, Swimming...in the Swimming Pool”

At the urging of his niece, Gerry Hunter first walked through the doors of KidsAbility’s Waterloo site not long after he retired. As a therapist with the organization, she knew that volunteers were needed to help out in the pool with the junior kindergarten kids who were attending KidsAbility School. Gerry already had experience as a swimming volunteer in the community assisting children with special needs, so he was very comfortable in the water. That first encounter was over 10 years ago and Gerry still makes it a priority in his life to give back, enjoying every moment in the pool with the children.

Each year, Gerry gets to meet a new student that he has the opportunity to swim with. “I love seeing them react to the pool. Some of the kids are afraid of the water at the beginning of the year, and watching them progress is pretty neat,” Gerry says.

Gerry firmly believes that: “You can’t just take, you have to give.” Being retired has given him the opportunity to volunteer more often using his time to “do something to help.”

As a proud volunteer, Gerry has brought his grandchildren to KidsAbility so that they can see what he does and how easy it can be to make a difference. “I hope that more people would consider the volunteer opportunities at a busy and happy place like KidsAbility because it is so rewarding. It is full of caring people.”

---

“ You can’t just take,  
you have to give. ”

---



*Gerry* Hunter

---

Volunteer

# Inspiring a Shared Passion

Growing up in Waterloo, Erin Broxterman and Emma Belanger were both familiar with KidsAbility. For Erin, living close to KidsAbility's Waterloo site, she passed by on a regular basis and attended camps such as Arts Express as a peer. For Emma, her journey took her through KidsAbility's front doors at the age of three after her preschool teacher had mentioned to her mom Emma's struggles to communicate clearly.

KidsAbility became a part of Emma's life as a preschooler and her therapist, Norma, worked with her to overcome her speech challenges as a little girl.

Although they wouldn't meet for years, both Erin and Emma's careers followed parallel paths, graduating as Speech-Language Pathologists. As they each looked to the future, their respective thoughts returned to a place that was not only familiar but helped inspire their shared occupation. Erin joined KidsAbility's team in January 2015 and Emma that August.

In 2015, KidsAbility had launched a pilot project alongside Wee Talk, the provider of speech and language therapy in Guelph-Wellington. The project was developed to coordinate services for children with multiple needs who would benefit from a multiple-disciplinary team in one appointment, as opposed to multiple appointments across various organizations. Having been at KidsAbility's Kitchener site, Erin transitioned to Guelph-Wellington that summer to be a part of this exciting pilot project.

The pilot proved a success — something that Erin is incredibly proud of — and provided a coordinated support team for KidsAbility's more complex children. "Working with children in a joint therapy model is my favourite part of this position. It's exciting to learn about other disciplines and to see how the collaboration helps our clients meet their goals," says Erin.

Erin was instrumental in turning the pilot project into a formal program and getting it started. When she went on maternity leave, Emma stepped in to build and grow this program from its infancy to a full caseload. On either end of Erin's maternity leave, she and Emma were able to overlap to ensure that the transition between clinicians went smoothly for each child.

"It only seemed natural when I knew that I wanted to work with preschoolers that I come full circle and return to work at KidsAbility, a couple decades after walking out of the door of the Rotary Centre as a client," says Emma who is quick to point out that her therapist, Norma, became her mentor. "I knew that I wanted to work in an environment where disciplines collaborated, clinicians were supported and clients' needs were forefront."

"It's fun to problem-solve with other therapists and often helpful to have another set of eyes, hands and ears in the room!" says Erin.



*Erin* Broxterman &  
*Emma* Belanger

Speech-Language Pathologists - KidsAbility



# Triumph Over Adversity

Sometimes it's easy for people to focus on children's disabilities — not their abilities. Yet, if they were ever to meet Nate, this would change in a heartbeat. After all, Nate has done more in his 11 short years than most of us do in a lifetime!

Whether it was kissing the Blarney Stone in Ireland, exploring the ruins in Pompeii or paying his respects in Flanders Fields, Nate has travelled the world and experienced so much. Considering he barely survived childbirth — he had episodes of apnea (where his breathing ceased) and bleeding in the brain — this is truly remarkable. However, he wouldn't be where he is today without some help.

"Thanks to the therapy and support from KidsAbility, our son is a confident, active child who has many opportunities," states his mother, Elaine Browne. "He downhill skis, rides horses, plays bocce, swims and loves camping. He doesn't let the fact that he can't hold a hockey stick prevent him from having a blast playing sledge hockey."

Seeing Nate's infectious smile, it's obvious that he enjoys life to the fullest and doesn't let his cerebral palsy hold him back from participating. "Nate has a sense of independence now that he wouldn't have otherwise," says his father, John McCarthy. Elaine concurs, adding, "Nate came home from school one year and he could not contain his excitement! He announced, 'I signed up for the running club at school.' We couldn't stop smiling for days because his spirit moved us! He could see no reason why he couldn't be part of the running club, and we love that about him."

With the help of his therapists, Nate the Great (as he has become known to his "extended family" at KidsAbility) continually strives to reach his full potential. "That's the spirit KidsAbility inspired in our son," notes Elaine. "Instead of feeling badly that he cannot take part, Nate accepts each challenge and finds a way to triumph over adversity."

---

“ Thanks to the therapy and support from KidsAbility, our son is a confident, active child who has many opportunities. ”

---



*Nate* McCarthy

---

Kids Can't Wait Cambridge Ambassador  
2014–2015

# Bubbling Over with Excitement

A happy and outgoing little boy, whenever Thomas Lotufo's excitement would bubble over he would struggle with being able to get his sentences started. Teachers at Thomas' daycare recommended that his family bring him to KidsAbility.

"We'd noticed that Thomas was stuttering. Not too bad, but when he would get very excited, it would be difficult for him to start his sentences smoothly," says his mother, Erika. "His father also used to stutter as a child and recalled that working with a speech therapist was very helpful in overcoming this disability, especially when started in early childhood."

Thomas began attending speech therapy appointments with KidsAbility Speech-Language Pathologist Jean Macleod when he was 3 ½ years old. Jean coached Thomas' family on how to help their son overcome his stutter.

His parents attended the Fluency Parent Training Program offered at KidsAbility. With Jean's guidance, they worked hard to better interact with him, focusing on listening and responding at a slower pace, making conversations less rushed and more meaningful. All of their hard work made a positive and significant difference in Thomas' speed of speech that helped him to reduce his stuttering.

"Thomas is a delightful, friendly boy who was always eager to participate and play all the games," recalls Jean. "He was so enthusiastic that it was a challenge to slow his speech rate down and encourage good turn taking skills, both of which were important in decreasing his stuttering. He loved to negotiate squeezing one more game into a therapy session!"

By incorporating a number of strategies such as modelling a slow rate, pausing, using more comments than questions and helping Thomas to establish realistic expectations of himself, he learned strategies that helped him express himself clearly.

"Our family, as a whole, also saw big benefit from the 'special time' suggested by Jean. Thomas would probably not have overcome this challenge without KidsAbility's help," says Erika.

"Thomas has made steady progress and only stutters occasionally now during the day. I am looking forward to seeing him take his enthusiasm and smooth talking into the next adventure," says Jean.

Today, Thomas is still very much that same happy and outgoing little boy, but when his excitement bubbles over now, this five-year-old boy no longer struggles to communicate clearly thanks to the support of KidsAbility, his family and early intervention.



*Lotufo* Family

KidsAbility Family



# A Ray of Sunshine

The possibility of losing a child can be frightening – just ask the Clemmers.

“After four years of trying, Dean and I discovered we were having twins,” explains Heather. “Our excitement was beyond belief — until the seventh month when we visited the obstetrician. Two hours later, I was in the hospital having an emergency C-section. Troy and Scott, my boys, were born weighing just 2 pounds each. They fought with everything their tiny bodies had to survive. It was touch and go, but they lived.”

After two and a half months in the hospital, the boys finally came home. Then the family’s lives took another turn. Troy was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. “We were told he would never walk unassisted,” states Heather. “Then, like walking into a ray of sunshine, we started at KidsAbility.”

Troy began physiotherapy and occupational therapy — and the changes proved remarkable. With the help of KidsAbility, Troy learned to walk unassisted! Today, Troy plays sledge hockey, participates in T-ball, swims and does so much more.

The Clemmers’ experience with Troy served them well when they decided to adopt Emma. “I grew up in a foster home for six years of my life,” states Dean. “As a way of giving back, I wanted to foster or adopt a child. Troy, Scott, my daughter Bella and Heather were all on the same page.”

At 18 months, Emma joined the Clemmer family. “If there was a way to seal the adoption, it was the discovery that she had cerebral palsy,” adds Heather. “We’d been through this before with Troy, so it wasn’t scary.”

From the age of two, Emma received therapy at KidsAbility — and she flourished. “Emma is so easy for staff to work with and her determination has taken her beyond what we thought possible,” says Heather. “It’s been such a blessing to get services at KidsAbility.”

Together, Troy and Emma prove that anything is possible — with the support of KidsAbility and a loving family.

---

“ It’s been such a blessing to get services at KidsAbility. ”

---



*Clemmer* Family

---

Kids Can’t Wait Guelph-Wellington Ambassadors  
2015–2016

# Coming Out of Her Shell

Sometimes a mother's instinct is all that you can rely on. With Liane Hayes, she sensed something wasn't quite right with her daughter Rayea. Eventually, Liane decided to contact KidsAbility – and thankfully she did. Rayea was assessed by staff and a pediatrician before being given a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) with sensory processing issues.

“The diagnosis was a shock, but there was also a sense of relief that my intuition was validated,” states Liane. “We were able to start therapy and Rayea was put on a very positive path. In fact, Intensive Behavioural Intervention acted as a springboard, further enhancing the skills she needed for community school.”

Upon reflection, the family couldn't imagine their lives without KidsAbility. “It's a special community that supports children with special needs,” says Howard, Rayea's father. “For us, it was a family-like environment, where the therapists helped Rayea come out of her shell. They gave her the confidence to become more social and develop a camaraderie with other kids.”

Today, Rayea swims, plays the piano, enjoys acting out scenes from her favourite movies and so much more. And while the family isn't certain what the future holds, there is one thing her parents do know: “We truly love the organization. KidsAbility means the world to our family. We can't even imagine what things would be like without it!”

---

“ We truly love the organization. KidsAbility means the world to our family. We can't even imagine what things would be like without it! ”

---



*Hayes Family*

---

Kids Can't Wait Cambridge Ambassadors  
2016–2017



# Celebrating Our Rich History and Bright Future

From proud but humble beginnings to an exciting future, KidsAbility has a rich and meaningful story!

Over the past 60 years we have grown and evolved to meet the needs of children, youth, families, staff, volunteers and funders in our communities.

No barrier can stand in the way for long because when the kids succeed, we all succeed!

Over the past 60 years, KidsAbility has helped 60,000 children and youth! Buildings have been built, names have been changed, programs have been added and removed as we respond to the needs of families but what has not changed has been the commitment to every family reaching their full potential.

We have much to be proud of over the past 60 years. We have much to look forward to in the next 60 years!

KidsAbility will remain dedicated to removing barriers, to building strong community connections, to finding innovative ways to deliver life changing services, to joining families in their life journey, to creating an environment that allows staff and volunteers to make their best contribution.

When we are all able to bring our best, to create opportunities, to remove barriers and build community then children and youth with special needs are not only accepted, they experience authentic belonging! When our staff, volunteers and donors are able to realize their full potential, KidsAbility is able to grow and evolve to meet the needs of those we serve today and tomorrow.

For the difference that KidsAbility has been able to make in the past and the present and will strive to meet in the future, we say: "You are most welcome!" For the opportunity to have been of service and to have the trust of the community and its members to provide such a service, we say: "Thank you! The pleasure is all ours!"



*Linda Kenny*

---

Chief Executive Officer -  
KidsAbility

# KidsAbility's Strategic Plan 2020:



## Mission:

KidsAbility™ empowers children and youth with special needs to realize their full potential.

## Vision:

Potential realized.

## Values:

- **Inclusion** - The uniqueness of each child and youth and the right to realize their full potential.
- **Respect** - An inclusive and empowering relationship with families and the wisdom they provide.
- **Collaboration** - The power of working together with families, partners, donors and funders.
- **Accountability** - A culture of professionalism, knowledge and accountability and a practice of resilient determination in all that we do.

## Our Launch Points

How We're Going to Get There:

### Innovative, Family-Centred Solutions

Achieved by:

- Enhancing service navigation;
- Responding to family needs through innovative ideas;
- Building partnerships that close gaps.

### Removing Obstacles to Services

Achieved by:

- Investing in system-wide networking across services;
- Strengthening and enhancing best practices in our services;
- Engaging in targeted family and community outreach.

### Strong, Complementary Partnerships

Achieved by:

- Building collaborative community relationships;
- Enhancing relationships with government representatives;
- Supporting the work of the KidsAbility Foundation.

### Growth of Our People

Achieved by:

- Realizing a true knowledge organization;
- Building staff knowledge and skills;
- Optimizing staff and resource potential.

### Clear and Purposeful Engagement

Achieved by:

- Providing clear communication to families and creating opportunity to receive insights;
- Improving communication and education within our community;
- Fostering a culture of clear and meaningful two-way communication.



We thank the many individuals involved in bringing these stories to life, in particular, Melissa Martz, Harry Endrulat and Dayna Giorgio for helping to capture 60 stories for 60 years!

This book has been generously sponsored by the family of Jack and Shirley Weber. Each story is a celebration of the thousands of success stories made possible through the foundational vision and faithful support of Rotarians and KidsAbility's staff, volunteers, community partners and donors.



Honouring our past...celebrating our future!



[kidsability.ca](http://kidsability.ca)   



Proudly Founded and Supported by Rotarians Since 1957