

gizmo

THE TETRA SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA: CUSTOM ASSISTIVE DEVICES

DRIVING AMBITION

HALIFAX: Mackayla has just turned three and loves to be mobile so she can be independent and play with other children.

Cerebral palsy does not stop her. And thanks to caring health workers and Tetra volunteers, she is now getting about by herself in a bright pink ride-on Mini.

“She wants to do everything,” said mom Melissa Faulkner, of Beaver Bank, Nova Scotia. “I’m always trying to find ways to make it possible for her to do things.”

She heard about the Tetra Society of North America through Halifax’s IWK Health Centre, a children’s hospital, where coordinator David Beattie works as a seating technician. Occupational therapist Julia Gates came up with the idea of adapting a child’s ride-on car by adding secure seating and a button-operated accelerator.

“Mackayla always needs different ways to play,” said Melissa. “The car’s a great idea because she needs mobility but she’s too small for her own power wheelchair, which all seem big and bulky.

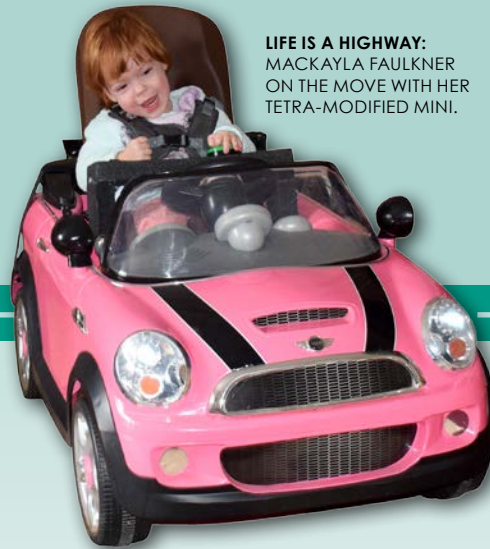
“It gives her the mobility of a power chair but in a colourful way.”

Mackayla, three in July, is at that age when she needs to be mobile and social – for the development benefits as much as the enjoyment it brings.

She loves playing with older brother Lucas, aged seven, colouring, and especially using his toy cars, so having her own Mini was the obvious extension of this.

“It’s the car she wanted – she chose it,” explained Melissa. “I figured she’d grow into it.

“Mackayla needed her own freedom and to



LIFE IS A HIGHWAY:
MACKAYLA FAULKNER
ON THE MOVE WITH HER
TETRA-MODIFIED MINI.



be able to move and play with other kids. It’s important for her brain development to be able to cover space without me holding her. And independence is a big thing for her.

“She’s a social butterfly, and plays with all the other kids – she’s so-so with adults. She doesn’t see us as the same amount of fun!”

Racing around in her stylish pink Mini has given Mackayla the freedom of their open-plan house, and she also gets to drive it outside when the weather cooperates.

Melissa says she might next ask David for a toddler seat with removable head support for use getting ready in the mornings – “She loves having pigtails put in and looking at herself in the mirror.”

David said this is the third child’s car project created by IWK and Tetra volunteer Ken George in recent months. They were inspired by US group Go Baby Go which provides modified ride-on cars to children with limited mobility.

He said: “It’s usually the first time children with disabilities get to move by themselves – they love it! There are micro wheelchairs for kids who are able to push themselves, but these cars are really for those who will be using power chairs when they’re older.

“There’s a lot of research on the importance for children to be able to move themselves through space rather than having someone else moving them.

“And it’s fun. It’s a little car not a big power chair.”

Whatever you want to access – work, rest or play – contact Tetra to talk about what’s possible. Call toll-free at 1-877-688-8762 or email info@tetrasociety.org.

TETRA SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA INDEPENDENCE, FREEDOM & ACCESS

Tetra is a registered charity that assists people with physical disabilities to overcome barriers. Our caring, compassionate volunteers invent ingenious devices or modify existing equipment to help people live independent and fulfilling lives. If you can help in any way – by offering your technical expertise, by helping us get the word out, or through making a tax-deductible donation – you will be helping make life more accessible for individuals with disabilities in your own community.

Hitch BIKING

“What else could a mother ask for?”



BIKE TO THE FUTURE: PUTTING THE TETRA WHEEL-CHAIR TRIKE HITCH TO THE TEST.

VANCOUVER: Tetra volunteers made a wheelchair towing hitch for a Vancouver man who wanted to ride his recumbent trike and then transfer to his wheelchair.

Ron Payne designed a swing-away trailer hitch for the back of the trike. “Maneuvering ability of the trike is not affected and the chair remains stable during sharp cornering at speed,” he explained.



HAMILTON-HALTON: A new mom who gets about on crutches needed a way to safely transport her son in a stroller.

Irena Kagansky-Young, of Burlington, Ontario, found that it’s not possible to safely hold a stroller while using crutches, but without them, she would have to lean on the stroller so much it would be at constant danger of tipping – which would spill her and nine-month-old Everett onto the floor.

So she turned to Tetra for a solution. Hamilton-Halton volunteers Glen McKee and Earl Bauman took on the challenge.

“I approached Tetra when my son Everett was barely two months old,” she explained. “I felt incredibly alone with no one to turn to for advice.

“I needed to find a safe way to go outside with my son without being dependent on others. I have poor balance and gait issues which would make it impossible for me to handle a stroller on my own, and if it wasn’t for Tetra stepping in I would have still been trapped inside a tiny condo with nowhere to turn.”

The Hamilton team promptly set about combining a stroller with a walker to create a stable device to allow Irena to take Everett out for Spring walks in the park. It has a solid frame, handbrakes and a safety strap that loops around her wrist, like on a running stroller.

“I have no words to describe how it feels to be able to, for the first time ever, take your child outside,” said Irena.

“The sun is shining on my face, I am free to



STEPPING OUT IN STYLE: TRAILBLAZING MOM IRENA KAGANSKY-YOUNG GETTING OUT AND ABOUT AND SHOWING THE WORLD ABOUT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES’ PARENTING POTENTIAL.

walk on grass and my lil’ one has the biggest smile the world has ever seen. What else could a mother ask for?”

But, she adds, the project has greater significance for her – it shows that people with disabilities are overcoming social barriers and entering parenthood.

It’s a subject chapter coordinator Sylvia Baliko feels strongly about: she regards disabled parenting as one of the biggest social changes of recent years.

“We’ve built at least eight or nine roll-under cribs over the years,” she said. “We keep cribs in constant use – people say we recycle them. We replace the mattress, and another family uses it.”

She said the chapter offered an adapted crib to Irena, but she didn’t need it – that particular crib is now out in Lakeshore, Ontario, being used by a paraplegic father.

Irena would like to start a support group “for the rights of parents with disabilities who often feel isolated and alone,” which would also educate the wider community about disability and parenting.

“We need to continue to debunk existing stereotypes and preconceptions about parenting with disabilities,” she added. “We are all capable beings with plenty of love to give regardless of the way we look, talk or walk.”

Earlier this year Irena nominated Tetra for the Burlington Best Accessibility Awards – we won the Accessibility Award.

TETRA *Thanks!*

- BC Rehab Foundation
- Bergeron Clifford LLP
- Burlington Community Foundation
- Catherine and Maxwell Meighen Foundation
- Chris Spencer Foundation
- Community Foundation for Kingston & Area
- Community Foundation of Mississauga
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- Munich Reinsurance Company of Canada
- Oakville Community Foundation
- Ottawa Community Foundation
- Province of British Columbia
- Quickturn Production Machining
- Shoppers Drug Mart Life Foundation



Tetra's high flying volunteer

COMMUNITY HERO: FLIGHT LIEUTENANT HARRY HARDY, DFC, FORMER MECHANICAL ENGINEER AND VETERAN OF 367 TETRA PROJECTS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

VANCOUVER: Volunteer Harry Hardy celebrated his 95th birthday in June – he's currently working on two projects to aid people with disabilities. . . and building a chicken coop in his spare time.

Harry, a veteran who flew 96 combat missions over occupied Europe in the dark days of World War II, retired as a sawmill chief engineer on his 70th birthday, then joined Tetra because he missed having something productive to do. Over the subsequent 23 years he's designed and constructed 367 life-changing projects for people with physical disabilities.

Harry likes to keep busy: his day begins at 6am when a couple of friends drop by to help clean his 7,000-square-foot aviary that's home to more than 30 pheasants, ducks and doves. Meanwhile, he's rearing fledglings in a brooder in his basement workshop.

And then there's the chicken coop he's making for his granddaughter.

"I'm building the coop to fill in while my Tetra projects are temporarily held up," he explains. "It's high-tech to meet the byelaws, now everybody in Vancouver is allowed to keep four chickens."

The first of these Tetra projects is to help a lady transfer between her wheelchair, toilet and shower in a tiny bathroom – he's building a seat that slides between the two on tracks. The second is an acrobat swing for a Vancouver-based housing non-profit.

Harry recently built a walker/gait trainer for Vancouver teen Ethan Kenney, aided by fellow volunteer Soroush Sefidkar, a 31-year-old mechatronic engineer, originally from Iran.

Soroush is full of praise for Harry's generosity of spirit and hands-on knowledge: "Harry has experience, obviously – he came up with lots of ideas.

"We came up with the dimensions and materials and drawings, and then all of a sudden Harry created a prototype in his shop. I didn't know how he did it so fast. I enjoy working with Harry and learning from him. It's great to think of him being able to help so many people – he's 95, and still helping his fellow humans."

Ethan's dad Allan said gait trainers are ideal for his 17-year-old son who cannot walk independently due to cerebral palsy, but commercial models are child-sized.

"He has the strength in his legs to stand and push himself, and it means he can face other kids and be mobile," explained Allan. "He never had to use a wheelchair until high school, and he uses the walker outside school.

"Harry and Soroush spent quite a bit of time on the design. Soroush had a computer application where he was able to model Ethan's current height and weight and the stability of the design, and what would happen if Ethan grows a couple of inches and gains 20 lbs."

He's impressed that the finished design is robust, has room for growth, and weighs half of the former child-sized model.

HARRY HARDY, OF COURSE, IS NOT RESTING ON HIS LAURELS. HE'S QUICK TO POINT OUT THAT HE GETS AS MUCH BENEFIT FROM TETRA PROJECTS AS THEIR RECIPIENTS.

"Harry has some outstanding skills, an understanding of various materials and a really good design mind. The walker he built is essential for my son's mobility."

Harry Hardy, of course, is not resting on his laurels. He's quick to point out that he gets as much benefit from Tetra projects as their recipients.

"In the beginning you are doing these jobs to help people with disabilities, but once you get into it you realize it's 50:50, half for you and half for them," he said. "It's good therapy. It gets me up and running, meeting people and out on the road."

If you have hands-on skills that could benefit people in your community, contact Tetra to talk about what's possible. Call toll-free at 1-877-688-8762 or email info@tetrasociety.org.



ACTIVITY TABLES WITH TRUE GRIT

EDMONTON: The recipient liked the adjustable child-size table built by a Tetra volunteer so much they asked for six more.

Volunteer Rene Haasdyk was honoured to fulfill the request – after all, each table helps a youngster with disabilities in his community to play and learn.

The initial request came in from GRIT, Getting Ready for Inclusion Today, a program for young children with developmental disabilities in Edmonton, Alberta. Occupational therapists wanted a table that could be used by children in their own homes.

They asked for it to be height-adjustable from 30 cm (12 ins.) to 60 cm (24 ins.), with a half-moon cutout to accommodate a child in a tomato chair, a specialized seat with positioning support.

"I did some research and looked around for ideas but ended up building my own," said Rene, a retired electrical contractor. "The people from GRIT liked it so much they asked for six more. I'm pleased with how they turned out."

The wooden tabletops sit on steel frames, with welding donated by the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology Waiward Centre for Steel Technologies and Mark Dostie at Standard General Inc.

Edmonton Mom Fenilyn VanDerveen said her son Devon, aged three, gets a lot of use from their table which has colourful height markings and a bright white top.

"It's adjustable so we can raise it as required depending on what chair he is sitting in," she explained. "Some of the chairs are higher than others.

"The table becomes an activity surface for Devon. He can reach things in front of him – beads, Play-Doh, whatever. It's really useful."

PLAY TIME: (PHOTO ABOVE) DEVON VANDERVEEN AT HIS ADJUSTABLE TETRA TABLE WITH BLACK CARD TEMPORARILY TAPED DOWN TO CREATE COLOUR CONTRAST.



WHEEL MEET AGAIN: KAROL GOUSCHUK SHOWING THAT LOADING HER TETRA TRIKE RACK IS AS EASY AS 1-2-3.

BUILD A BETTER TRIKE RACK

CALGARY: Longtime Tetra volunteer Bill Caswell devised a car trike rack that can be used by people with limited physical strength.

Although there are automotive carriers on the market, these require the user to physically lift the trike into place. Which isn't ideal, considering many recumbent trike owners have physical disabilities.

The request came in from city resident Karol Gouschuk, who has poor balance due to cerebral palsy and wanted to transport her trike so she could ride with friends, explained Caswell.

"I made a trike rack with a channel running along it that you can roll the bike along," he explained. "She can load the trike one end at a time.



"Karol can lift the back wheel, which is really light, then uses a custom-built loading lever to elevate the front end of the trike, and pushes the trike along the rack.

"Commercial units seem to use Velcro straps to hold the trike in place, but I came up with locking devices to secure each of the three wheels for travel."

He's proud that the entire steel-built rack weighs only 9.5 kilograms (21 pounds) and, fixing to a trailer hitch, can be removed when not required.

"I painted it flat black to hide my bad welding," joked Bill, who says the project was a simple idea – albeit one that took 24-hours of shop time to complete.

Wherever you want to go, contact Tetra to talk about overcoming barriers. Call toll-free at 1-877-688-8762 or email info@tetrasociety.org.

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TETRA SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

DEDICATED TO ASSISTING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES TO ACHIEVE AN INDEPENDENT AND FULFILLING LIFE, ONE ASSISTIVE DEVICE AT A TIME

Have an idea for a project? Want to know what's possible? Want to overcome a barrier?

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