

Designers unite for family with ill child

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News - William Greer is your average five-year-old: He enjoys video games and playing outside with his friends. Through his care-free, fun-loving exterior, one would never suspect he suffers from hydrocephalus caused by a tumour on his brain stem.

Just over a year-and-a-half ago, William's parents Patrick and Lindsay Greer began to notice some changes in their son. He was experiencing vision loss, weak immunity to common bugs, and his teachers noted increased difficulty getting along with the routine at school. After some mixed opinions from various doctors, they were told it was nothing to worry about. The symptoms subsided setting William's parents temporarily at ease.

Little did they know that the appearance of William getting better actually meant he was getting worse.

"The gravity had not really set in at that point," said Patrick. "It was once the symptoms became severe that we became really concerned."

Hydrocephalus, sometimes referred to as "water on the brain," is a condition which causes the build-up of spinal fluid in one or more of the brain's ventricles, usually due to a tumour. Symptoms of hydrocephalus in children William's age range from cognitive issues like difficulty to learn new things and overall academic performance to physical issues like vision loss, constant fatigue, problems with balance and coordination, seizures, enlarged skull and in severe cases where complications arise, even death.

William's improvement was caused by the blockage in his fourth ventricle. The pressure became so high that a membrane had burst which caused

the spinal fluid to naturally drain. When the symptoms returned, they were worse adding trouble walking, balancing, fatigue, and a new found fear of heights.

"He has struggled with fatigue," said Patrick. "From before the diagnosis and since he just hasn't regained the stamina and cognition."

Treatments for William's condition can come in the form of chemo and radiation therapy. Neurosurgery can also be an option, but unfortunately not in William's case due to the proximity of the tumour to his brain stem. Life for the Greers could very well be a lifelong battle filled with MRIs, treatments and regular check-ups.

"We've done imaging on a regular basis and unfortunately they've shown that the tumour has continued to grow," said Patrick, fighting back tears. "So we've recently been back to decide how we are going to continue. There are treatments that are going to be necessary to ensure we can at least stop the growth."

William has had two procedures done involving shunts being implanted. The first led to a difficult recovery as his body had adapted to the increased pressure. The second was a replacement with an approximate recovery time of 36 hours. He is scheduled to begin chemotherapy this week.

Despite his young age, William has a good understanding of his condition. He knows how it works and when information is being held back. Despite this he remains in good spirits, the fun-loving boy they know. He wants to invent a new form of MRI someday, one which isn't so closed in as he doesn't enjoy the isolation of the machine.

"He still wants to play and be a kid," said Lindsay. "He is very upbeat and his personality is the same."

William's ordeal is a lifelong



BRANDON GILLET/METROLAND

From left at back: Dan Smith, Matt Irish. Middle: Beverly Anger-Nelson, Sarah Kidder, Candace Plotz, Kelly James, Patrick Greer. Front: Aiden, William, Lindsay (holding Gwen).

condition involving many treatments and imaging every two months for at least the next three years according to his parents. They are thankful to CHEO for all the support. "We've adapted and found new ways to make it more comfortable because it's not pleasant, but it's something that we have to go through," said Patrick.

Cue the kindness of the human heart. Local designers Kelly James, Candace Plotz, and Sarah Kidder have teamed up as the WillPower Girls to provide the Greer family with a complete basement makeover. Together with Dan Smith of Strokes of Genius Painting, and Matt Irish of Right Angle Renovations, along with support through social media and renovation suppliers, the Greer family will have their basement finished and decorated to give them a comfortable space.

"Originally we thought bedroom, but this way the whole family can enjoy it," said Kidder. "Somewhere for them to spend quality time together."

According to Kidder, it started about a year ago when

the WillPower Girls first talked about doing something for the Greer's but couldn't decide what. "We were all having dinner as friends during Kindness Week which originally sparked the idea," said Plotz.

After revisiting the idea this year, the girls put the project in full swing. They approached Smith, who works regularly

with Kidder, to do the painting and construction. He quickly agreed to do the work at no charge.

"When she contacted us to see if we wanted to be involved we said of course," said Smith.

While some items are being donated, others will need to be paid for. To help with this, the team has set up a fundraiser

through ucaring.com which has already received donations exceeding \$4,000 in slightly more than three weeks. "That will cover materials which are hard to get donated like drywall and studs," said Smith.

Along with the online fundraiser, there has been no shortage of support on their Facebook page, facebook.com/thewillpowerproject and their blog, willpowergirls.blogspot.ca, as well as countless friends raising money to help out. They can also be found on Twitter, @willpowergirls.

"Even if people aren't donating they're spreading the word and sharing on Facebook," said James. "So anything people are doing to help is awesome."

They also have corporate sponsors helping out such as: Para Paints, Tonic Living in Toronto, Randall's Décor, and Neo Vintage furniture in Cornwall. Though the design is not quite complete the team has a fairly good idea how it will go and are aiming for a completion date nearing the end of May.

"We can't give too much away because it's supposed to be a surprise," said James. "But it's pretty cool."

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