

# 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