

# 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