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For Immediate Release

Recognizing an innovative champion for kids of all abilities

Waterloo, ON, October 15, 2020 – Retired air force pilot and mechanical engineer Tom Jeary loves to solve problems. It turns out children are the ones who have benefited the most from his innovative thinking.

For nearly five decades, Tom has helped children and youth with challenges to achieve greater independence through his innovative and customized devices, aids and adaptations to everything from games to wheelchairs. As a volunteer approaching 30 years with KidsAbility this November, he has helped hundreds of children who may have struggled by creating or adapting everyday devices so they can fish, use a camera, operate a remote, ride a bike, or tie their own shoelaces.

Tom and his wife, Nancy, were honoured earlier this month at a small socially-distanced outdoor reception at KidsAbility with the Elaine Ormston Outstanding Supporter Butterfly Award—the highest honour bestowed by KidsAbility Foundation annually.



“This award honours individuals whose contributions have made a lasting and remarkable impact on the lives of children and youth with challenges at KidsAbility and Tom and Nancy truly embody the spirit of the award through their contributions to making a difference,” says Lisa Talbot, KidsAbility Foundation Executive Director. “With a dedication of time, treasures and innovative spirit, the Jeary’s continue to create a humble legacy with KidsAbility that helps children and youth achieve great things at home, at school and in the community.”



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Tom first recognized a need in the 1970s when, as a Rotary member in Montreal, he toured a child's facility and met children with varying degrees of paralysis either laying on mats or in adult wheelchairs. Drawing on his engineering background and spurred by a kind heart, he built 11 go-cart style modified wheelchairs and donated them to the facility.

When the Jeary's relocated to Waterloo in 1979, Tom found KidsAbility and turned his time, talents and heart of gold into creating a lasting impact. Whether it has been assisting in KidsAbility's therapy pool, helping on the ski hill, or donating financially, he has helped hundreds of children in ways not otherwise possible.

Six years ago, Tom set his engineering to a smaller task. He turned his passion for photography, a shy resident chipmunk affectionately named Chester, and some handmade miniature props into a self-published children's book, *The Chipmunk Fall Fair*. To date, Tom's benevolent and altruistic nature has made him well known to many in Waterloo and beyond the region. Throughout the past 40 plus years, Tom has been recognized as Rotarian of the Year and Waterloo's Citizen of the Year, and has received the national King Clancy and Governor General's Caring Canadian Awards for enhancing the lives of persons with disabilities.

Today Tom and Nancy continue to lead the way when it comes to giving back. Through their long-standing faithful financial support as KidsAbility's first donors to make a public planned giving commitment, they encourage other donors to follow their lead and give a gift early to see it put to use helping kids.

– 30 –





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Background Information:

Across our community, 11,279 children and youth with challenges receive the help that they need to realize goals important to them. It could be overcoming a stutter, strengthening muscles to take that first step or learning the social skills to make a friend—together, we make these firsts possible. With over 60 years of experience, KidsAbility helps children and youth with challenges and their families to achieve great things at home, at school and in the community. Our goal is to get the right support to the right child at the right time and donations help to make that possible.

KidsAbility Foundation inspires and engages community partners, individuals and groups to help make a difference in children's lives. The Outstanding Supporter Butterfly Award was created in 2003 to honour individuals and groups who have made a significant volunteer contribution to KidsAbility Foundation. In 2009 it was re-named the Elaine Ormston Outstanding Supporter Butterfly Award in honour of Elaine Ormston whose commitment to the mission of the Foundation and whose energy in pursuing its goals exemplify the characteristics of an outstanding Foundation volunteer.

Demand for KidsAbility's services continues to exceed the resources provided. Donations raised through our community assist in funding services, programs, and resources, and allow KidsAbility to serve an additional 1,000 children and youth each year. Without this generous support, more children would be waiting even longer to receive the care that they deserve and so desperately need. Presently, there are over 1,312 children waiting for services at KidsAbility.

With your help, we can help more children to live richer and fuller lives. Together, we can ensure that every child and youth has access to the services that they need where they live, learn and play to realize their full potential.

