

Changing LIVES



On April 10, 2012, Graham Mackenzie and his mom were featured in an article in the Globe and Mail entitled, "For those with intellectual disabilities, a decades-long wait for a home and care"

We recently sat down with Susan, who shared with us her story and told us what an initiative like LIGHTS means to her family.

Graham is 30 years old and was born with an intellectual disability and physical challenges as a result of unique brain chemistry. I was told that he might live only a few years but to take him home and raise him like my other two children. Graham defied everyone's expectations except his dad's and mine. He learned to walk, talk, run, downhill ski, and graduated from Humber College in a program designed for individuals like him. He has a wide circle of friends because he is outgoing and very personable.

In 2006, Graham's life changed. He had two strokes. We were warned it might happen but there was nothing we could do. Now, Graham needs much more help with everything - from getting up in the morning to going to bed at night and lots in between. Graham is very busy! Along with his ever-present helper, he uses WheelTrans to participate in the activities he enjoys so much like dances, movies and concerts with his friends.

Graham wants to have a home of his own in the community with a roommate and the supports he needs to live a safe and meaningful life. Graham's dad died of cancer not knowing what Graham's future would hold. I want to know that after I am gone, Graham will continue to have a fulfilling and independent life. I am Graham's main caregiver. I provide 70% of his care (117 hours a week, 6084 hours a year). We get 54 hours of help a week (2,808 hours a year) and I have a full time job. I will not be able to provide this level of care forever. My nightmare is what will happen to Graham if something happens to me?

Graham wants to have a choice about where and how he will live. The provincial government has an individualized residential program that is the perfect solution for our needs. However, many families are waiting to receive funding from this program and have no idea when funding will become available. And if it does, how can we be ready? This situation leaves a huge gap between our dream and our reality.

LIGHTS helps to fill this gap for families. It gives us an opportunity to build a partnership with another family whose son or daughter is a good match for Graham and to test out how that partnership will work. LIGHTS helps families navigate the muddy waters of putting this kind of plan together and will even help with some funding, if needed. LIGHTS is a great solution for those who are on waiting lists and want to be involved by committing their own time and resources in a solution for their loved one. Without something like LIGHTS, individuals like Graham would have very limited living options.

None of this is easy. It's hard to let go. It's very hard for me to trust that Graham will be safe and taken care of. It takes time. But, I will rest easier knowing that Graham will have an independent, fulfilling and supported life after I am gone. Our partnership with LIGHTS is changing our lives.

Connecting Families

In April a brand new section on ConnectABILITY.ca was launched to help families connect better and have access to information when they need it.

Continue the conversation on Connected Families

This is a place for YOU to talk and connect about everything from the little stuff to the really big stuff, how you solved problems, found resources and found ways to make your dreams happen.



Tell your stories, your ideas, your successes and even your frustrations. Share your tips to help others succeed and find tips that could help you.

www.connectability.ca/connected-families

ConnectABILITY.ca

Investing in FUTURES

Through the support of the LIGHTS Advisory Board and its Fundraising Committee, new partnerships are being forged each day.

A parent recently said, " *Your donations gave my son the opportunity to live on his own, independently, in his home, with support. There is no price tag on that. The gift of a life of one's own is priceless.*"

We couldn't have said it any better. Thank you to all who have chosen to take the LIGHTS journey with us.

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Filling the Gap

A gift to LIGHTS will help provide funding for those in need and seeking a home of their own. Visit our website at www.LIGHTS.to to give today!