



# SHRINERS

CARE FOR KIDS

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***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

## **Shriners Care Cruisers gives Westbank youth with cerebral palsy a rare chance to travel on easy street**

(Kelowna, BC) For 18-year-old Niko Maloff who has cerebral palsy, one of the few things in his life that is actually easy is the drive from Westbank to Vancouver for medical treatments and services. That ease is thanks to the Shriners Care Cruiser program whose buses are specially designed to transport children and youths with disabilities to Vancouver health care facilities from locations throughout BC.

The free service also offers a vital respite for his mother, Jane Maloff, when in transit with Niko who is non-verbal, immobile and tube-fed. In the past, Maloff was unable to travel with Niko alone due to the necessity of suctioning his airways 10 to 20 times a day to prevent aspiration.

“There was no way I could drive the Coquihalla Highway in winter and regularly pull over to do that,” said Maloff who works as a LPN nurse at Lakeview Lodge in West Kelowna.

The Care Cruiser the Maloffs use is equipped with beds and comfortable La-z-Boy chairs so that Niko doesn’t have to sit in his wheelchair for the entire trip. It also has a space for changing Niko who has no bladder or bowel control, and enables him to travel with his meds and special food. Maloff jokingly refers to it as his “U-Haul”.

The Maloffs first learned about this invaluable program in 2005 through a surgeon at BC Children’s Hospital. Niko’s first hip surgery left him in a massive cast with his legs in a fixed position 36 inches apart. Maloff had no idea how she would get him home in her vehicle until the Shriners came to the rescue.

Since then, the Care Cruisers have significantly improved the quality of life for both Niko and his family and broadened their horizons. They are now able to make the trip to Vancouver three or four times a year so that Niko can access care and pain and symptom management services at Canuck Place, and the entire family can enjoy a well-deserved break.

“A lot of parents aren’t aware of the Care Cruiser program and yet it can make life so much better for them,” added Maloff.

“Some parents have so many things to remember and take care of with a disabled child, they can barely think themselves. Our specially equipped coaches enable children to travel comfortably and safely with their parents without adding to the mountain of medical expenses parents are already facing. A trip to Vancouver could be the proverbial straw that breaks the camel’s back. We help make sure they don’t break,” said Tracy Cromwell, executive director for Shriners Care for Kids.

To promote and raise funds for this critical service, Shriners Care for Kids is teaming up with Carl’s Jr. Restaurants to present the first annual “Stars for Kids Day” on April 9 with a portion of proceeds from purchases benefitting the 3,500 people Shriners serves each year. The public may visit a Care Cruiser in person between 1:30 p.m. and 3 p.m. at 1688 Bertram Street in Kelowna. They may also make a donation at [www.bcshriners.com](http://www.bcshriners.com).

More than tasseled hats, clowns and mini-cars, Shriners Care for Kids provides access to exceptional pediatric care. The transportation network, including the Care Cruiser buses, enables children from throughout the province to travel to Vancouver health care facilities. The Care Cruiser program has logged approximately two million miles within BC since it began in 2001. No other Shrine Club in North America provides this unique service. As well, transportation, accommodation, and all medical treatment are provided at Shriners Hospitals for Children for patients requiring specialized procedures.

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