



SHRINERS

CARE FOR KIDS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Shriners Care Cruisers help drive hockey dreams for Penticton boy with vacterl syndrome

(Penticton, BC) The Shriners Care Cruiser buses have been as big a part of 12-year-old Brandon Drury's life as his love for hockey, and served to help fulfill his dreams of taking to the ice.

Since he was two-years-old, Care Cruisers have regularly transported him to BC Children's Hospital for treatment for Vacterl Syndrome, a spinal birth defect which was diagnosed in vitro and resulted in his right side being higher than his left. He had his first back surgery at age four when two rods were placed in his back, and he had to learn how to walk and dress himself.

Today, Brandon is a goalie for a Penticton special needs hockey team, the Upper Deck Vees, and aspires to play for the New York Rangers when he's older.

For his single mom, Jackie Hooper, the Care Cruisers have been vital to Brandon's care and progress, not to mention an opportunity for meeting other kids with disabilities and forming new friendships. A busy student in early childhood education who doesn't have a car, Hooper is extremely grateful for the ease and economy provided by this free service whose buses are specially designed to transport children and youths with disabilities to Vancouver health care facilities from locations throughout BC.

"The Care Cruisers have helped us so many times, especially during winter. Brandon cannot sit for long periods of time and the amenities within the coach – including beds and La-z-Boy chairs – make the trip much more comfortable for him. And then there's the kindness of the drivers and the other families we meet on board. The drivers will even pull over for him when he has to get out and move around," said Hooper.

One of the Care Cruiser bus drivers is the grandfather of a former Penticton Vees team member so he and Brandon have a lot to talk about on their journeys together. Brandon will be benched and restricted to a wheel chair for eight to nine months when he has his next back surgery. But he will have his Care Cruiser trips and eagerness to get back into the rink to help him through recovery.

"When he is sleeping, he dreams of hockey," added Hooper.

“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. Penticton residents may visit a Care Cruiser in person between 4 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. at 100-1636 Main Street. They may also make a donation at www.bcsriners.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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