



# SHRINERS

## CARE FOR KIDS

April 16, 2014

***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

### **Shriners free Care Cruiser program challenged by rising fuel costs** **Single mom of boy with Down's syndrome lauds service, advocates for donor support**

(Vancouver, BC) A single mom at 19 with a baby with Down's syndrome who had just undergone cardiac surgery, Kristal Tremblay had no idea how she would get home from the hospital let alone afford six trips a year from Enderby to Vancouver for her son's treatment. The Shriners Care Cruiser program came to the rescue six years ago and she and her son, Tucker, are now a living testament to the importance of donor support for a program potentially at risk due to rising fuel costs.

The Shriners Care Cruiser program is a free transportation service whose buses are specially designed to transport children and youths with disabilities to Vancouver health care facilities from locations throughout BC. The buses offer a safe, clean travel environment and are outfitted with beds and comfortable La-z-Boy chairs, movies to watch, and tables at which families can gather to visit and/or play cards.

However, Shriners Care for Kids has seen a 25 per cent increase in the price of gasoline over the last seven years, including the latest hike. That, plus the expense of equipping the buses with specific amenities, makes the Care Cruiser program challenging to maintain.

"Many people don't know what we do, or even that we accept donations because our members have done most of the fundraising in the past on a grassroots basis. However, times and the economy are changing and we need to broaden our donor outreach in order to continue to operate this high-in-demand program," said Tracy Cromwell, executive director for Shriners Care for Kids.

Recently relocated to Abbotsford, Tremblay will be forever grateful for the invaluable assistance the Shriners Care Cruiser program gave her when she resided in the Interior community, and hopes other families in need will get a chance to benefit from the same remarkable service.

"The Shriners were amazing to us. The drivers were great. I had to give meds along the way and was able to do this easily. The bus had entertainment for Tucker. I appreciated feeling a part of the community on the bus and being able to make connections with other families. It would be sad if those other families who depended on it as I did were no longer be able to access it," said Tremblay.

According to Shriners Care for Kids, the program has safely transported 3,500 people a year, and travelled almost five million kilometres. Shriners Care for Kids recently held fundraising events in four Interior communities in conjunction with local Carl's Jr. restaurants. The events were very successful but the Shriners require additional donor contributions to keep the wheels of the buses going round and round.

"It is difficult for many families to drive themselves and, if they do, they may need a van to accommodate a wheelchair. Some families – like Kristal's – have no access to transportation whatsoever. This is a unique service families rely on and we need the public's help in funding it," added Cromwell.

To find out how you can make a donation to help fund the Shriners Care Cruiser program, please visit [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. No other Shrine Club in North America provides this 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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