

Tetra: Making a difference for many families

By LORI GALLAGHER

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The Tetra Society is breaking down barriers, one innovative design at a time.

"The society is a non-profit group that recruits volunteer engineers, technologists, health professionals and anybody who has a technical mind to be able to create assistive devices for people with disabilities, things that aren't already available on the marketplace," says **Christine Plourde**, P.Eng., co-ordinator for the Fredericton chapter of the Tetra Society.

Often, the items they adapt are simple things, something a person needs to do an everyday task.

"In our chapter, we've done a lot of things dealing with recreation because that's not funded under the Medicare system," explains Plourde.

One of the items volunteers have adapted is a motorized car and one of the first to try it out was six-year-old **Dylan Boyd**.



Boyd says her family is lucky to have Bleau. "She's such an inspiration because she doesn't set any limits for these special needs kids."

Bleau really feels the kids can learn things, says Boyd, even when parents have their doubts.

"Mom and dad get used to limitations and they (the staff at Stan Cassidy) say 'they can do that,'" says Jim Boyd, Dylan's father.

His wife adds, "As parents, we're thankful to have Lise. And we're thankful to Tetra, because you can't buy something like this on the market."

Since then, Dylan has driven the adapted car at school and around his neighbourhood.

NEWFOUND FREEDOM Six-year-old Dylan Boyd enjoys riding in his customized jeep. The toy allows the little boy to control its movements using a chin-activated switch.

*"I was in tears, it was amazing."
Dylan went all over the place, driving through the halls of the Stan Cassidy Rehabilitation Centre to the encouragement of staff and patients, before taking it outside.*

His mother, **Kim Boyd**, vividly remembers the day Dylan, who has cerebral palsy, learned to drive it. "We were going to meet with **Lise Bleau**, an occupational therapist at Stan Cassidy (Rehabilitation Centre)," she says.

When she and Dylan arrived, Bleau had a little grey and red jeep there that had been adapted by Tetra.

When Kim Boyd learned what Bleau had planned, she admits she was surprised, as Dylan can't sit on his own and needs to be in supported seating.

"He's a quadriplegic. He has movement in his arms and legs yet he has no control over his arms and legs," explains Kim Boyd.

She couldn't imagine how he'd be able to drive, when he'd never done anything like it before, but she trusted Bleau.

"We had him all buckled and fastened in so he was nice and safe, and we had a little piece in the back for head support," she says.

Then Bleau fastened a bib made of mouldable plastic around Dylan's neck

and placed the control button, a happy-face switch, on that so he would have access to it.

"In order for him to make the car go, he had to press down with his chin on his happy-face button," says Boyd. "And within an hour-and-a-half he was doing it."

She adds, "I was in tears, it was amazing."

Dylan went all over the place, driving through the halls of the Stan Cassidy Rehabilitation Centre to the encouragement of staff and patients, before taking it outside.

"He even got to go over the lawn and into the mucky part," she says.

"He was laughing - it was just amazing to see him go in that little car."

"It's priceless," says Jim Boyd. "There was such excitement and joy on that boy's face."

He adds, "You don't think how important that would be to a little boy, but it is."

Kim Boyd says Tetra is a great organization. Thanks in part to the work the volunteers there are doing, she can see that there are no limits on what her son can do.

"As a parent of a child with special needs, we're learning every day, too," she says. "You don't mean to limit them, but you're very overprotective of them."

Having the opportunity to drive the adapted car gave Dylan such a sense of accomplishment, she says. "Just the expression on Dylan's face. It was like, 'Wow - everybody is so proud of me,'" says Boyd.