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## LIVING

### Volunteer helps Riley ride again

Matthew Wild [mwild@nsnews.com](mailto:mwild@nsnews.com)

A retired engineer has come forward to ensure that a North Vancouver boy suffering from a rare disorder can continue to enjoy bike rides.

Seven-year-old Riley Denman is a "happy, sweet-natured child" who patiently endures a range of developmental problems, explained mom Colleen Denman.

He was born with a rare brain disorder, Dandy-Walker syndrome, which occurs in approximately one in 25,000 babies. It has caused mobility and communication problems.

Denman said the syndrome is similar to cerebral palsy.

It means that while her son can use a walker to get around over short distances, he requires a wheelchair to travel further afield. He communicates using a form of modified sign language, but can understand what is said to him.

Denman's older son, nine-year-old Curtis, is devoted to Riley. The two are dedicated to sports, including soccer, baseball, basketball and especially hockey; Curtis as a participant and Riley as what Denman calls "the ultimate fan."

One of Riley's favourite activities was bike riding, with mom hooking a child's carrier to the back of her bike and leading him on excursions around the Pemberton Heights area where they live.

But two years ago, she said, Riley became too big. Although he does not weigh a great deal, his legs were too long to safely fit the carrier.

"Riley cannot sit independently on a bike, he needs to be completely surrounded by a seat," she explained.

"We looked into alternatives to our old bike carrier, but they cost between \$4,000 and \$10,000, and we do not have that kind of cash."

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Instead she would walk or run with the wheelchair while Curtis rode his bike alongside.

That was until she heard of the Tetra Society, a non-profit group of largely retired professionals dedicated to adapting standard household equipment so people with disabilities can lead fuller lives.

Tetra's Vancouver group took up the challenge last fall, with one of its members, Roy Hamaguchi, meeting with mom and son to work out a solution.

In March, he brought the family a prototype made from copper pipe, Denman said.

"Riley was really excited to see his bike seat again," she said.

Hamaguchi then built a steel frame version of three-quarter-inch gauge steel, she explained, which the family thought they would have by April or May.

"But Roy was concerned this would not be strong enough, so he took it apart and rebuilt using one-inch steel," she said.

This was delivered late last month, and the two have started taking to the road on test runs.

Denman notes the weight of the new adaptation means "I'm going to have killer thighs."

More importantly, her son can now resume one of his favourite pastimes.

"It is very important for Riley to take part in activities like this," said Denman.

"He looks to whatever his brother is doing. He loves to be outside, and watches any kind of sport. Ever since getting the bike, Riley has asked for his bike helmet and to go riding every day."

Her next ambition is to find a trailer or car hitch so she can take her son around the Stanley Park Seawall, saying the journey to and from this location would make it too long a trip for Riley, who can only sit in the bike seat for up to two hours.

Denman is full of praise for Hamaguchi's engineering excellence, saying he is "quite a genius" who also designs bumper bars so kids in wheelchairs can play soccer.

She said the tandem-style cycle attachment cost \$500, with Hamaguchi charging just for the parts, being able to reclaim and modify a seat, handlebars and Velcro foot-straps.

Pat Tweedie, provincial co-ordinator for Tetra, said the group takes on some 10 to 12 projects a month throughout the Lower Mainland. It has 37 volunteers, of whom a couple hail from the North Shore.

More help is always needed, but such people must be from an engineering, technical or health care background and able to work one-on-one with people with disabilities.

"Our volunteers are great and Roy Hamaguchi in particular is wonderful," Tweedie said.

"Our most common request is to help people with mobility devices, particularly children.

"All we ask for is the cost of materials. Our volunteers are very good at finding and recycling materials, and they work together so someone will usually have the required item in their shop."

To find out more about Tetra contact the group at 604-688-6464.



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