

In Touch

COMMUNITY LIVING UPPER OTTAWA VALLEY



Kirby Adam enjoys the independence of his own place

Kirby Adam has the grin. It's a look that's common to anyone who is proudly showing off a new car, a new baby, or a new home.

In Kirby's case, it's his own home – newly renovated by his father, complete with drapes sewn by his mother, and a place that he has all to himself.

He shares the grin with a house full of people. All of them have come to Kirby's house-warming party, to share in the accomplishment he is so clearly enjoying.

It's been a long road to this house for Kirby. His journey to independence began nine years ago with 24-hour support. He's tried sharing apartments with friends and various other living arrangements over the years.

The criteria had become clear: Kirby needed his own space, and he needed something manageable and affordable. The uncertainty of rising rents did not fit the bill.

"We must have looked at 12 or 15 houses," his mother, Noreene, says with a shake of the head.

In the end, the perfect home came with a long "to do" list and a lot of unrealized potential. The house became a three-month retirement project for Kirby's dad, Claude. It also became a family endeavour, with technical help provided by a brother who lives in Arnprior and works as an electrician, some help from an uncle who is a plumber, and design advice from Kirby's sister.

Kirby helped with some of the work and, most importantly, provided the happy grin at his house-warming party that told everyone the right move had been made.

"I'm sick and tired of moving," he says, pointing out that he has lived in three different places in one year.

At 29, he can now feel completely settled. His train photos are on the wall. His satellite dish is installed, ready to receive every single Maple Leafs game. Support workers are on hand to help with supper, laundry and the day-to-day necessities. Kirby is ready to take on the responsibilities of snow shovelling in the winter and lawn mowing in the summer. And his family knows his future is secure.



Kirby Adam in his new house with his parents, Noreene and Claude.

The frustrating battle to get back home

Lenard Lachance is facing a bureaucratic roadblock that will not let him get home.

For 16 years, Lenard has been on the waiting list for the supports he needs to live in Sudbury. Lenard's name has not moved up even a single line on that waiting list.

"This is probably the most frustrating thing that I've ever encountered," comments Kathy Bennett of Community Living. "He's a displaced person who can't get home."

Lenard has spent a number of years in the Pembroke area since he left the Rideau Regional Centre, but his dream was always to move back to the Sudbury

area where his family lives. His sister-in-law explains that the family thought placement in Pembroke was their best option at the time. They didn't realize that, if they'd waited, Lenard would have eventually been placed closer to home.

Lenard volunteers at the hospital and the museum, and he receives ongoing support from Community Living.

"How can we create all those things for him in Sudbury?" asks Kathy Bennett. "We just can't do it. We'd like him to have everything he has here."

Lenard's family shares the goal. His sister-in-law, Faye, has been writing letters and making phone calls throughout the years. She points out that

Lenard is now 50 and his mother is in her 80s. Time is slipping away.

"Just to get him back to Sudbury would be wonderful," she says. "It would be so much easier if he could be here. He'd be part of the family."

Kathy Bennett points out that Lenard's family has done everything possible to be involved in his care over the years. They've come to Pembroke for planning sessions and they take Lenard home for holidays whenever they can.

"It's just a nightmare for these people," she says. "What's so impossible about living in the same town as the rest of your family?"

Terry Felske builds his family's dream home

Every family has its dream home.

For some, it's a quiet spot in the country. For others, it's a separate bedroom for every child and a basement family room. For Terry Felske, the dream involves plenty of convenience and the flexibility to keep his family together as their needs change.

Terry lives in his Roy Street home with his wife, Florence, and their son, Jamie, who both have special needs. Their previous home was too tight for Jamie's wheelchair, and just didn't meet their requirements. So Terry looked at an empty lot down the street and envisioned his dream home.

"He said he lost a lot of sleep over it," chuckles Florence, as she shows a guest through the home Terry built.

It is a warm, inviting house that emphasizes open concept living and comfort. Stairs and carpets have been abandoned to allow for maximum mobility. Heated floors provide a cozy warmth, even on the coldest winter days.

"Everything was planned with Jamie in mind," Terry says. "He's not confined to any part of the house."

It took 18 months to design the home, and the attention to detail is revealed in every corner.

Jamie, who is 30 years old, has an area to himself that is private, but still closely connected to the rest of the house. He has direct access outside through the garage, and can open and close the doors himself with a remote control. On days when it's too cold or wet to actually get outside, he can sit and enjoy the mural that covers the main wall of his room. It was chosen by Jamie himself and features a lush, outdoor scene.

The rest of the house is also designed to bring the outdoors in. Windows have been arranged all along the livingroom and diningroom area to make sure the sun shines in all day long. A sunroom faces west to take advantage of afternoon warmth, and includes French doors to an outside patio. Terry's practical approach helped him design a house that works for his family and meets their needs. In creating it, he has built more than a house – he has given his family their dream home.



Right: The Felske family, Florence, Jamie and Terry, enjoy cozying up in front of their gas fireplace.

President's message - a year of achievements

I would like to welcome back all the Board of Directors of Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley: Ken Bertrand – First Vice-President; Ronald Tremblay – Second Vice-President; Dave Marcus – Treasurer; Noreene Adam – Director; Ricky Crigger – Director; Stephanie Levasseur – Director; Tim McCann – Director; Karen Payne – Director; Keith Rae – Director; Sean Sullivan – Director; Enid Holohan – Director.

Last year as president was a challenging and exciting year as we were involved in some way with 190-some individuals and families. Needs continue to grow and it is going to take more inclusion and government funding to help all the people who need support.

We, as an organization, have priorities and objectives: 1) Help each person to direct their planning and services; 2) Support inclusion and promote acceptance in the community; 3) Address growing unmet needs and waiting lists; 4) Encourage and promote safety and security; 5) Raise our profile in the community; 6) Support people in self

advocacy; 7) Help people improve their standard of life; 8) Improve staff recruitment and retention.

One of the achievements was involving a subcommittee of our education committee, composed of Noreene Adam, Sue Sullivan, Paul Melcher and myself. We drafted a brief to the Human Rights Committee, "Achieving Barrier-Free Education for Students with Disabilities". This draft was presented to the Human Rights Consultation Committee by some members of our committee. Our association was quoted in the report and the work of the committee. The report concluded that many students with disabilities do not have equal access to educational opportunities, either in the primary, secondary or post-secondary levels.

We have two representatives on the Special Education Advisory Committees (SEACs) of each school board: Katharine Selander and Noreene Adam. We are also working with Algonquin College to help promote a computer course slated to start in January 2004. We also have the

potential for a restaurant worker course.

We have a proposal to the government for "New Places to Live" for the Upper Ottawa Valley region and are hopeful it will be accepted.

I would like to offer my congratulations to members of our past and present board who received Ontario Volunteer Service Awards from the Minister of Citizenship, Carl Defaria: Keith Rae, Heather McCurdy, Noreene Adam, Gary Severin, Sean Sullivan and myself. It was a great honour.

Also, congratulations to Gary Severin on winning the local municipal election, and Ken Bertrand on his "near win".

This column outlines just a few of the challenges we face as an organization. The directors and I want to thank all of the dedicated office staff, support workers and managers, as well as our executive director, Paul Melcher, for their dedication and hard work.

Happy New Year to all.

**Jane Dougherty, President,
Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley**

A message from the Executive Director

As I sit down to write my newsletter contribution, a few days now before Christmas, I am reminded that we have much to be thankful for, many people to remember and much to look forward to. This edition of **In Touch** shares the celebrations of a number of individuals who have acquired their own homes. A few short years ago, this everyday happening seemed unattainable for most people with intellectual disabilities. This is another positive step that people are taking on their road to community living.

The future of children's developmental services in Renfrew County is still uncertain. We are very concerned that children and families have not received the supports and advocacy they need to attain inclusion in their communities. To achieve this, families, first and foremost, must have a voice in the services they receive and how the organizations providing those services operate. The transfer of these services can only

succeed if those in power provide these opportunities and are willing to listen. As I look around the office today, I see Community Living staff working tirelessly to help people have a nice holiday. Many of these staff have probably had little time to focus on their own much-deserved holidays. I hope that they have had a great holiday full of enjoyment and rest.

The holidays are also a time to think of

those who are no longer with us and recall their many gifts, the journeys they have shared and the journeys they have inspired.

We are reminded by success, as well as great sadness, that life is a gift to be lived fully each day. I extend best wishes to you in this New Year.

**Paul Melcher,
Executive Director**

A tip of the hat...

Community Living would like to acknowledge the following members of the Renfrew County legal profession, who attended a special session with Ken Pike in October on estate planning for parents with disabled adults and children: Tammy Yantha of Barry's Bay; Thomas Roche of Deep River; and, from Pembroke, Matthew Bradley, Kenneth Conroy, Mary Fraser, Blair Jones, Timothy McCann, Richard Owen, J.P. Quintel, Roy Reiche, Peter Sammon and Mary Shushack.



Starting out with her own home base

"I'm only 23, and I have a house!"

The enthusiasm and wonder are clear in Paige Gibson's voice.

As she wraps up a Christmas vacation with her parents in Chalk River, Paige is clearly getting anxious to get "back home".

She'll be heading to the ranch bungalow in Carleton Place that she purchased last fall with her sister. "I wasn't expecting to buy a home," Paige notes, adding, "It still hasn't really hit me yet."

Home ownership is just one of Paige's recent accomplishments. She has completed two years at Algonquin College in Ottawa and is just one step away from achieving her full driver's licence. "It's fun," she says of the many challenges she's conquered, as she quickly adds belly dancing to the list.

"She's been really successful in establishing a life for herself," comments Suzie Desjarlais, Community Living service coordinator.

"She's proud of herself, and we're proud of her," Suzie adds.

Paige's parents agree, and add that seeing their daughter settled in her own home gives them newfound peace of mind.

"When you're our age with a daughter as young as Paige – we want to know that she does have a home," says her mother, Alice. She points out that many other people dependent on Ontario Disability Support Pensions are living well below the poverty line without any future security.

"These people fall through the cracks," Alice points out.

By helping Paige get established in her own home, the Gibsons are sure that won't happen to their daughter.

The shared house is the perfect solution for everyone involved. Paige is happy to help her sister, who is a social worker in Ottawa, manage the household chores and care for her three-year-old son, Braeden.

Now, Paige is ready to focus on her next challenge in life... finding paying employment.

"I want to be in an office," she says, explaining that she loves to work with people and enjoys typing, computers and filing.

Finding the right placement in a tight job market is proving to be tough, but Paige has a solid faith in the future.

"I know if I keep striving, I'm going to get somewhere," she says. "With the family I have, I know I can do just about anything."

The Gibsons point out that finding the right home for Paige took a dedicated effort, and they credit Community Living and the local parents' support group for helping them sort through the options and information.

The job-finding process is similar, as Paige explores the opportunities of college and various work placements. But with her determination and positive attitude, everyone is confident Paige will succeed.

"She's found a very rich life after high school," says Suzie, noting that Paige was once told that her future options would be limited by her disability.

"She's proven them wrong," Suzie concludes.

Paige Gibson, left, visits with her parents, Wilfred and Alice, at their home in Chalk River.



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