

Burnaby Connexions

Burnaby Christmas Bureau begins

Something to Give Back



Michael Childs with his two counsellors during his graduation in June, 2008

“I am normal after my accident; it just takes more time and determination to do the things most people take for granted,” said Michael Childs as he sat on his wheelchair on the podium to receive the 2008 Courage to Come Back Award in the Youth category in May. It was the Coast Mental Health’s 10th Annual Gala, and Michael was recognized as a special 18 year old who has overcome great obstacles.

Michael has gone a long way since the fateful day that changed the course of his entire life.

Playing outside in the backyard, Michael, then 7 years old, was swinging a dogs leash around the clothes line. It

was held up by a post that was old and rickety. He pulled down on the dog leash, and it came crashing down violently on the back of his head.

He never saw it coming.

His mother, Nancy, recalls watching him helplessly in the Intensive Care Unit at the BC Children’s Hospital as he lay there, unable to move or talk. A successful operation was done to relieve the pressure from his brain as he suffered from a closed brain injury where the chances of survival were slim. A month later, he was transferred to Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children for rehabilitation, where he stayed there for another year.

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More than 10 years later, he wheeled himself across the stage in June 2008 to graduate from Moscrop Secondary School. He says, "I got my robe and suit from the Cinderella Project, and a cool hat and sunglasses," as he shows a picture with him and his two counselors at his graduation.



Michael wants to help others, and to give back to the community that helped him out so much. He volunteers his time at the Variety Club. "I'm the top seller of Variety Club Hearts for the last five years!" he says proudly. "I've even started a coin club, where I place coin boxes all over Burnaby schools to help raise money for the Variety Club."

The Burnaby Christmas Bureau has also done its part in helping make their Christmas special. "Christmas is not fun without the gifts," says Nancy. "We've been going to the Burnaby Christmas Bureau for years, even though we missed a few because Michael was sick. I love the sponsorship program. It makes Christmas that much more special. The food, clothing, and gift certificates really help."

As I'm about to leave their house, I ask Michael what it is that he wants to be when he gets older. "I want to start

my own business!" he says enthusiastically.

With the help of others, Nancy and Michael have been able to make it through difficult times. Michael feels a strong connection to the community that helped him when he needed it, and now he is returning that care and love back. His commitment to help others is now a daily mission, and someday, he will start his own business.



Michael holds his 2008 Courage to Come Back Award plaque and card that he received in May. ■

Burnaby Christmas Bureau 2007 Statistics



Ever looking for improvement, we hope to beat last year's numbers!

Number of families registered: **1,171**

Number of toys distributed: **11,902**

Number of families sponsored: **193**

Total number of sponsors: **138**

Total number of volunteers: **175**

Donations: **\$164,538.42**

Value of food certificates: **\$98,490**

Sharing is Caring during the Holidays

The holiday is a great time to get together with your loved ones or co-workers to help make it special for another family. There is nothing better than seeing faces glowing with happiness when sponsors come by with their gifts and hampers, and the abundance of appreciation and care that is shared by both sides.

The Sponsorship program through the Burnaby Christmas Bureau provides the opportunity to connect with a family and to create new memories this holiday season.

Here are a few testimonies by people who have participated in the sponsorship program in 2007.

Danielle* had a great time with her coworkers sponsoring a family:



"The family sponsorship experience was very rewarding for the four of us. We had fun shopping for the family. We could barely contain ourselves until delivery day. The four of us delivered the goods to the family and were welcomed with open arms. We had stockings filled for all three, gifts wrapped from Santa and a couple boxes of food with a food voucher for her to go and pick up fresh things for their Christmas dinner.

Violet* was overwhelmed, her kids were grinning from ear to ear. The young mother and her 2 kids were so appreciative. She even had a box of chocolates and a card to show her appreciation. We were very surprised with that.

We then went for dinner to talk about the experience. We wished we could be flies on the wall to see their faces when they opened their gifts. We were sure they would love everything and that made us happy.

This was so enjoyable that we agreed to do it again next year. As a matter of fact the whole office wants to get in the giving spirit this Christmas. Thank you for the opportunity!"

Nicole* decided to sponsor a family with friends from her office. At first, they had qualms about sponsoring a family with a different religion and did not celebrate Christmas with the

typical roast turkey and presents. However they were soon able to overcome the cultural differences when they discovered that culture or religion does not matter when one person can help another:

"Originally when I met with Jenny*, she was the most gracious and humble woman. In conversation with her, she mentioned that her husband and herself were sleeping on a king size mattress which he pulled from the garbage. It had things poking through it which were not very comfortable.

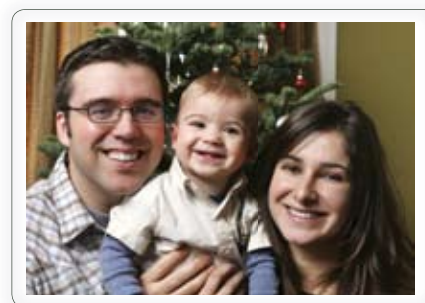
The only reason I was told about it, was because I asked if they needed sheets for the bed and what size. I contacted Sleep Country who has the WRAGS program. For \$90.00 we were able to purchase a quality used bed that was cleaned, sanitized, and delivered. When hearing the story, the fellow at Sleep County threw in the bed frame, bedding package which was sheets, pillow cases and a comforter.

She called to thank us and said that already we had done too much. It just goes to show you that people working together provided something this family would not have been able to do, for really very little cost.

[...] The children were thrilled with all the treats in the food hamper. Jenny* reciprocated by offering us her traditional kabobs and a Christmas card. She said that this was the best Christmas her family has ever had.

I just wanted you to know that because of her gratitude and warmth, she left me and others with what the true spirit of giving is all about."

* name has been to changed for anonymity



We hope to motivate you too, to make a difference in a Burnaby family's life this holiday season. If you would like to sponsor a family, please visit www.burnabycommunityconnections.com or call 604-299-5778 ext. 23. ■

November Events



For more events or information, check out the E-Calendar on our website www.burnabycommunityconnections.com.

Christmas Craft Fair

When: November 21, 2008; 2pm to 7pm
November 22, 2008: 10am to 3pm

Where: Bonsor Complex

See what folks around the Lower Mainland have spent all year creating! The perfect holiday gift is out there waiting for you! Only new, personally handcrafted items are sold. Admission to craft fair is free for buyers.

5th Annual Santa Claus Parade

When: November 22, 2008; 10am to 2pm

Where: Eastburn Centre

Join us along Edmonds Street for the parade. Post parade, visit Santa, enjoy hot dogs, hot chocolate, crafts, games and more! Free admission.

Pro-D Day Loonie Skate

When: November 24, 2008; 11:30am to 2:30pm

Where: Kensington Complex

This public skate is a low-cost recreational opportunity. Admission is only \$1.00 per person; free for children three years and younger. Skate and helmet rentals are included in admission fee.

Congratulations to Joyce Fletcher!

After completing the E-Newsletter Survey, she won a great Starbucks gift basket with 2lbs. of the classic Anniversary Blend, and 2 Starbucks mugs!

Fill a Stocking Event

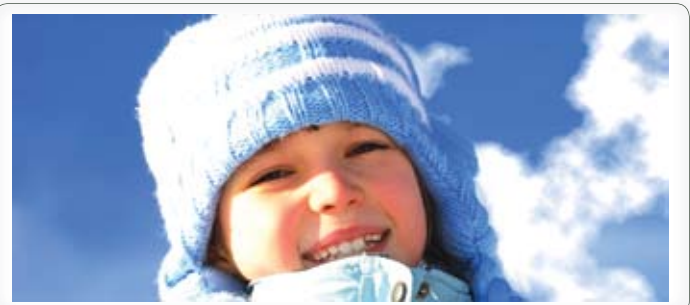
Back for the 2nd year, the Fill a Stocking Fulfill a Wish Event is finally here! Taking place at the scenic and beautiful Eagle Creek Restaurant on November 20, 2008, a family-style traditional turkey dinner will be served, along with festive entertainment and good times.

After dinner, feel free to come join us for a silent auction, featuring exclusive findings such as a one night stay at the elite Hotel le Soleil, a gift basket from Creative Packaging, and a week long cruise getaway!

Funds raised will go towards the Burnaby Christmas Bureau, to provide food certificates and toys at Christmas for low-income Burnaby families.

Tickets are \$75 per person. You can also book for a table of 10.

If you would like to attend this event, or you would like to donate an item for the silent auction, please call Burnaby Community Connections at 604-299-5778 ext. 21. ■



Do you have any suggestions, comments or a story you would like to share?

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Publisher:
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