NDAD’S MISSION

Enhance the quality of lives of individuals facing health challenges.

SIZING UP BROOKE

Forks mom gets right fit for daughter via NDAD’s free equipment loan program

The doctor gave Brooke Carlson a restriction she simply had to follow: no running, walking or putting weight on her hips for one year’s time.

Hardly the type of restriction welcomed by an 8-year-old active in gymnastics since she was 2.

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Story and photos by Mike Brue

Lisa Nelson and her daughter, Brooke Carlson
BROOKE

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Still, Brooke recalls the pain she felt in the summer. Her mom, Lisa Nelson, recalls when she realized it was not a minor ache.

“I just assumed she hurt her groin because she had been doing the splits,” Nelson said. “We knew it meant business when she asked to see the doctors.”

Turns out Brooke has Legg-Calve-Perthes, a childhood disease that involves one hip or occasionally both.

According to Mayo Clinic’s website, Legg-Calve-Perthes occurs when the ball portion of the hip joint — the intersection of the pelvis and thighbone — receives inadequate blood supply. That causes the bone to become unstable and even die, which leaves it vulnerable to breaking easily and healing poorly. The ball portion of the joint loses its round shape, introducing friction.

“In an adult, it’s an arthritic hip,” Nelson said. “In children, we just can’t leave that alone because it’s growing.”

For Brooke, the course of action was to reposition her right hip during a procedure done Sept. 5 at Gillette Children’s Specialty Healthcare in St. Paul. She missed several weeks of school.

Brooke and her mom were sent home with an adult wheelchair to use. Brooke adjusted somewhat but she couldn’t maneuver the larger chair easily.

It was so large, heavy and awkward that Nelson struggled to lift it in and out of her car. She needed help — usually from her husband, Michael Nelson — but their work schedules meant he wasn’t always available to assist.

“We were really just stuck,” Carlson recalled.

In mid-October, while seeking a quick, temporary solution, one of the doctors at her employer — Valley Bone and Joint — suggested she try calling charitable nonprofit NDAD, which has a temporary assistive equipment loan program.

Nelson called and learned that a smaller chair was available, and immediately she drove a few minutes to NDAD’s Grand Forks office near Columbia Mall.

“Within five minutes, I had a chair in my car,” Nelson recalled. “I was just ecstatic. It was totally perfect.”

Brooke’s reaction when she saw it: “It’s tiny!”

She transferred herself into the smaller chair, took it for a spin and was able to maneuver it much more easily — so much so, her mom made a quick video of her daughter and posted it on NDAD’s Facebook page, with their thanks.

The family’s Labrador retrievers, Bella and Shadow, were eager to follow Brooke, too.

“Loves it. Doesn’t like the thought of having to give it back” once the equipment loan ends, Nelson said. NDAD short-term equipment loans typically run for up to 90 days.

As for her Legg-Calve-Perthes, Brooke “is really accustomed to it,” Nelson said. “She definitely has learned to live with what she has. She does incredibly well. People have been very accommodating, too.”

Brooke’s time as a gymnast probably is over.

In fact, the Grand Forks girl has been advised to stay away from aggressive impact sports in her life to avoid making her hip issues worse.

“At some point, she probably will need hip replacement — between 35 and 50” years of age, Nelson said. “We need to do as much as we can to protect her” from worsening problems.

Brooke has started swimming several days a week at Grand Forks YMCA pool.

“She took off like a fish as soon as she got in the pool,” her mom said.

But the 8-year-old isn’t stopping there.

According to her mom, who recently began a second career as a certified health coach, Brooke Carlson’s plan “is that she and I open up a yoga studio together.”

It just might be an ideal fit.

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Please contact us if you’d like more copies.
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NDAD lends equipment

NDAD’s short-term equipment loan program is available through its Grand Forks, Minot, Fargo and Williston offices. It’s a free service.

The equipment is used by people who have been injured or who are recovering from illnesses or surgery, and by people with congenital or other long-term health challenges. Some people need the equipment for only a short period of time. Others borrow equipment for days or weeks — up to three months allowed — until they purchase similar equipment themselves, through insurance providers, or with NDAD’s help.

The estimated total savings by North Dakota residents who used NDAD’s short-term equipment loan program in 2013 was almost $285,000.

The equipment loan program includes manual and power wheelchairs and accessories; scooters; shower chairs and benches; crutches; walkers, knee walkers, walker trays and transport chairs; bed rails; reachers; transfer benches; portable ramps; canes of various types; IV poles; bathtub and shower safety railings; commodes, gait belts and grab bars; and toilet seat risers, rails and safety frames.

At Grand Forks and Minot, NDAD has accessible vans available for use for short trips.

For more information, call (800) 532-NDAD.

Minot woman says she’s ‘very, very thankful’ for NDAD’s accessibility, mobility assistance

An accessible van helps Dawn Olson maneuver the increasingly busy streets of Minot these days. She gives NDAD a share of the credit.

Olson, 55, appreciates the challenges facing people with disabilities, and her career is about helping those people.

Herself a woman with cerebral palsy who uses a power chair full time, Dawn works as an independent living specialist at Independence Inc. Before that, Olson was a consumer liaison at the North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities.

Until the past year, Dawn often borrowed a NDAD accessible van that’s available for loan for short trips. All she had to do was find a driver to help her — Olson doesn’t drive — and then make sure the gas tank was filled when she returned it.

Then, a family in Minot generously gave Dawn an older van after learning she had transportation needs. Still, the van wasn’t accessible; she sought a chair lift to make it so, but she couldn’t afford it without help.

With general assistance from NDAD, Olson needed to contribute less than $200 toward the purchase and installation. Plus, she added, NDAD’s paperwork “was super easy, and I’m very thankful. Very, very thankful.”

“Never in a million years had I thought I would have a van. Thanks to the generosity of friends and family, it’s possible."

Dawn uses her van when Minot’s accessible transit buses aren’t available. Rather than fight Minot’s heavy traffic, she uses the van only when necessary.

NDAD first assisted Dawn in 2002, shortly after she returned to Minot, where she was raised and where her mother still lives.

Olson had spent 22 years in Utah, first as a Brigham Young University student, then for years as an IRS tax examining clerk. But six months after she was back in North Dakota, Dawn was laid off from her job at Minot’s IRS office.

That made the timing of NDAD’s assistance all the more helpful, she recalled. The nonprofit organization provided general assistance with a modification of the condominium she purchased, she said.

“I’ve always, always, always appreciated their support and assistance,” Dawn said about NDAD. “They have been so generous to me over the years.”

DID YOU KNOW? Wheelin’ & Dealin’ online advertisements, courtesy of NDAD, provide a forum for people to buy or sell new or used assistive equipment. Ads are listed at NDAD.org. To place, remove or extend an ad, please call (800) 532-NDAD.
NDAD is a nonprofit, charitable organization founded by concerned citizens to assist mentally and physically disadvantaged people in North Dakota, many of whom are not eligible for services from other agencies.

Disabling conditions often are very costly. NDAD was founded on the belief that people with disabilities, when given the opportunity, can live more satisfying, productive lives — and NDAD has helped thousands do just that since its creation in 1975. This often requires the purchase of specialized equipment, medical treatment, or other services.

NDAD provides financial assistance through funds generated by both the organization and community projects. NDAD also provides information and referral services to help people receive assistance through other agencies, when possible.

It’s AMAZING what people can do when there’s help.