

DARLING HOME FUNDRAISER TO BENEFIT LOCAL FAMILIES

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For most parents, there's a certain level of worry that comes with leaving your child in the care of others. But for parents of special needs children, these concerns can reach a whole new level. Add in some complex medical needs and it might actually be impossible to find a regular caregiver.

"Most people don't understand that we can't just get a babysitter," said Erin Gibson, whose six-year-old daughter, Piper, suffers from a rare form of epilepsy known as infantile spasms. "She has a G-tube (feeding tube), she's on new seizure meds, and you would have to know about suctioning."

The neurological condition has left young Piper

unable to sit, hold her head up, stand or eat on her own. She's currently home-schooled due to being immunocompromised, doesn't sleep through the night and requires her last round of feeding and medication at midnight every day.

The exhaustive schedule makes the respite offered by the Darling Home for Kids that much sweeter for the Acton family.

Every three months, Piper is offered the opportunity to stay for the weekend at the rural Milton facility, which provides pediatric hospice care, respite and residential services in a homelike environment for medically fragile children.

The home's specialized nursing and support staff not only meet the complex needs of the youngsters in their care, but also provide

unique activities and programs geared specifically to them.

"The facility itself is phenomenal," said Gibson. "They do art therapy with Piper, and pet therapy with St. John Ambulance. The hydrotherapy is great too as she's so tense all the time. She's able to relax and ease up her muscles. When she's there, she's herself."

While Piper is nonverbal, big sister Kaeleigh said she can tell Piper truly enjoys the facility's programs and staff. The nine-year-old is also thrilled about the opportunities the Darling Home affords the entire family.

"It's really nice to have that time with my mom and dad to go on a hike or something that would be hard with the wheelchair," she said.

For Gibson, it's about



Melanie Hennessey/Torstar

Six-year-old Piper Gibson, who suffers from a rare form of epilepsy, is among the local children who will benefit from the Darling Home for Kids Wheels fundraiser. She's pictured with father Matt, mother Erin and big sister Kaeleigh.

the little things that others may take for granted, like going to bed at a normal hour and getting a good night's sleep.

"The Darling Home

gives us time to refresh and lets us connect," she said. "It provides us with opportunities for that one-on-one time with Kaeleigh."

It's families like the Gib-

sons who will benefit from the Darling Home's upcoming Wheels fundraiser ride on June 23.

The signature event invites cycling enthusiasts to ride for the enjoyment, competition and physical challenge while supporting a good cause. The festivities start and finish at the Mattamy National Cycling Centre in Milton, which also serves as the location for the post-ride lunch and celebration.

Since its inception in 2011, Wheels has raised over \$750,000 in support of capital projects and the core programs offered at the Darling Home for Kids.

For more information visit www.darlinghomeforkids.ca.

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