

Local firm opens its heart and wallet to aid employee's ailing son

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Staff Writer

Ron Campbell of Jamaica has been working at Sheridan Nurseries in Glen Williams for 33 years through the Offshore Workers program.

From his home in Cessnock, Hanover, about 45 minutes from Montego Bay, Jamaica, Campbell has traveled to Canada every year for eight months, working at Sheridan to make a better life for his wife and four children.

He has paid to put all his three older children through school and college (in Jamaica, school is government-sponsored until Grade 4 and then it is pay-as-you-go by the parents) and also paid to educate his nephew.

Ron and Margaret have a fourth child— 13-year-old Michael.

Michael is handicapped.

During Christmas of 2004, Sheridan Nurseries president Bill Stensson and his family took a holiday in Jamaica and visited Ron and his family.

When Stensson returned, he told senior vice-president Karl Stensson and his wife Valerie about Michael and how he was severely handicapped.

Stensson suggested to Karl and Valerie that Sheridan should find a way to help.

"The next time we saw Ron we asked him about Michael," said Karl, "We learned Michael has scoliosis, which is a permanent and worsening curvature of the spine. It's a degenerative disease, which causes a person to double over and not walk upright."

Ron told Karl how he and his wife had taken Michael to Kingston, Jamaica for consultation. The doctors said the operation was too complicated, and suggested Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children.

When they applied, Sick Children's Hospital turned them down, too.

The Campbells were referred to the Shriners Hospital in Montreal as the

Shriners have a program to assist children and also cover the cost of part or all of the medical procedures.

In April 2005, Valerie Stensson became involved, contacting the committee at Shriners to review Michael's case. The committee reviewed the case in June, and turned them down as well.

Stensson then talked to a nurse in Montreal who suggested the same doctors might perform the operation at Montreal Children's Hospital.

One of the surgeons there told Stensson that Michael would, in fact, require three operations. The first would lengthen the tendons in Michael's hips, knees and ankles and he would need four to six months of rehabilitation to learn to walk upright again.

Following rehab, two operations would fuse his spine in an upright position—one from the front and another from the back.

The total cost of the operations and rehab would be \$75,000.

"I presented it to the executive at Sheridan," said Karl Stensson, "and they immediately agreed we'd cover the cost of the operations now and then address the issue of where the money comes from later."

That turned out to be the easy part.

"The Canadian High Commission in Jamaica was less than co-operative," said Karl. "Val had finally secured an appointment date for Michael to be assessed in Montreal, February 2, 2006. We started in November (2005) and over the holidays Margaret took a three-hour bus ride (each way) to Kingston three times. Each time the High Commission would take what they had asked for but each time they added something new."

By late January they still did not have permission for Michael to travel to Montreal. The government wanted further guarantees Michael's care would be fully paid for— not be a burden on the



Margaret Campbell and her son Michael were visited by Val and Karl Stensson of Sheridan Nurseries at The Shriners Hospital in Montreal last weekend, where Michael is currently undergoing physiotherapy after having corrective surgery on his legs, hips and ankles. He will require two more surgeries to completely correct his spine, caused by Scoliosis. The cost of the surgery has been covered upfront by Sheridan Nurseries, which are now holding fundraisers to raise the funds.

Photo courtesy Karl and Val Stensson.

Canadian health care system.

"That guarantee had been provided many times," said Karl, "but the Canadian High Commission wanted another form of guarantee. It was apparent they were dragging the process out."

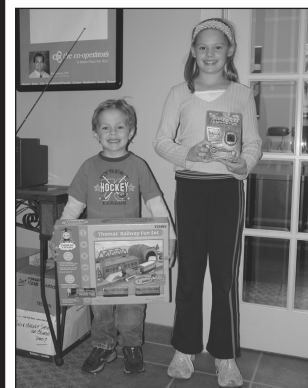
Valerie finally e-mailed Wellington-Halton Hills MP Mike Chong with details of the case.

"To Mike's credit he was back to us in one hour," said Karl, "we explained to him that the Canadian High Commission would not speak to us directly."

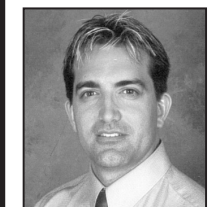
Chong called the High Commission and soon after both the High Commission and Chong's office in Ottawa contacted them to say Michael could come to Canada.

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