

thank you!

Alberta
Children's
HOSPITAL 
FOUNDATION

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Giving kids a voice!

"I love you, too."

Even the simplest words hold incredible power. For parents and caregivers of children who have a limited ability to communicate, life can become an exhausting game of guesswork and charades. Without words and the ability to express even basic needs or feelings, frustration, discouragement and a sense of helplessness can overwhelm children with illnesses like cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, brain tumors, autism and developmental delays.

Thanks to donors like you, these children have been given the chance to find words for what they want to say. Your generosity has opened up a whole new world for hundreds of southern Alberta children and their families.



Duncan Johnson with his father, Doug. "It was amazing to watch Duncan's personality come to life once he was able to start using words!"

Duncan's New World

Twelve-year-old Duncan Johnson was born with severe cerebral palsy. For most of his life, only his family and very close personal caregivers were able to interpret what he was trying to say through non-verbal sounds and visual cues. "Often times, when someone is as severely handicapped as Duncan, the assumption is they are mentally handicapped, too," points out Duncan's dad, Doug. "We always knew Duncan was in there and had lots to say. He just didn't have a way to say it." Duncan's challenges to communicate would often leave him frustrated in social settings as he was limited in his ability to take part in conversations or school activities with others.

Then, two years ago, everything changed. Specialists at the Alberta Children's Hospital introduced Duncan and his family to a donor-funded Vanguard speech

generating communication device. With the use of a high-tech computer and head-operated switches attached to his wheelchair, Duncan is now able to toggle between pictures, phrases and even a full keyboard to clearly tell his family and teachers - through a speech output device - what he wants to say. "It has given us the chance to get to know our son," says his mom, Patti. "He tells jokes, he asks questions, he is part of the conversation. It's so wonderful, it just makes you want to cry!"

*Generous community support is helping the Alberta Children's Hospital excel, especially in the field of **NEUROSCIENCES** - helping children with injury and illness of the brain and spinal cord.*

With his newfound ability to communicate, Duncan wrote a story so imaginative that it inspired award-winning author Robert Munsch to fly to Calgary for a special visit! The hero of Duncan's story was an adventurous boy in a wheelchair who used his Vanguard to disguise his voice and escape danger.



How Donors Make a Difference

Eight years ago, community support funded the creation of a crucial new service at the Alberta Children's Hospital called the Augmentative Communication and Educational Technology Service (ACETS). This special program gives children who can't speak access to a large collection of hi-tech communication tools which they can "test drive" in their daily lives. ACETS specialists work to find the right tools to fit the children instead of making children fit the devices.

As a result of ongoing donor support and a growing inventory of specialized equipment, hundreds of children in southern Alberta have found ways to communicate with their family and friends!

A Leader in Western Canada

With a wide range of communication technology in its inventory and a full complement of speech pathologists, occupational therapists and various assistants, the ACETS team is a leader in augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) in western Canada. "ACETS has been so helpful to us," says Patti. "To have all this expertise and all these services in one place - we're just so grateful."

The Power of Communication

"Working with these children and their families is such a privilege," says Kim Beckers, ACETS coordinator. "To see the look on the kids' faces when they realize they have the power to say what they want - even simple things like 'I want to change the channel on TV' - it really makes your day!"

Thanks to you, our specialists can provide the tools and technology our kids need to find their voice.



Alberta Children's Hospital Foundation

2888 Shaganappi Trail NW
Calgary, AB T3B 6A8

Toll Free 1-877-715-KIDS (5437)
T 403-955-8818 F 403-955-8840

www.childrenshospital.ab.ca



IN HIS OWN WORDS

Dear People;

I have cerebral palsy. When I was born my brain was hurt. Children feel happy because get to talk. I can talk to anybody. I can say Duncan. I can ask people some question? I can talk school, I can say aide what want. I can talk to family, I tell thirsty, I'm hungry, what's up, I'm fine.

Sincerely,
Duncan Johnson