Ontario Health atHome

CAREGIVER RECOGNITION
20 ABOVE& BEYOND 26
BIG HEARTS HELPING HANDS

Sue and David Lovell

For Sue and David, their unwavering love for their two foster children, Patrick and Breeze, knows no bounds. Their journey as foster parents began when Patrick first came into their lives at the age of two. David, then a paramedic, and Sue, a former nursing aid, thought they were ready to meet the level of care he required to help him thrive. Five years later, a seven-year-old sweet little bundle of energy named Breeze would complete their family.

For Sue and David, the priority was providing their foster children with the best quality of life and as many experiences as they could. While Patrick had his own health care needs earlier in life, with Breeze, her outlook was always uncertain, and the level of care has significantly increased year over year. For Sue and David, every day was a gift, so they focused on making memories, traveling to places like Banff, Calgary, Halifax and Myrtle Beach. They also enjoyed exploring their hometown of Kenora, particularly the Lake of Woods, where they would spend time fishing and camping.

These were cherished times and something that Sue would later be grateful for as Breeze's care needs increased and impacted their ability to travel in the same way they used to. As it was becoming clear that Breeze would soon require full-time care, Sue, then a small business owner, left her career to provide this support.

In 2015, Breeze was admitted to hospital and was later transferred to Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children for the specialized care she'd now need. After learning of the exceptional medical challenges Breeze would face and the need for 24-hour caregiver support, Sue and David made the difficult but necessary decision to relocate, leaving their lives, jobs, community and dream home in the north. To them, it was important that they could continue to care for Patrick and Breeze in their home, wherever that may be, and to do so, they needed to be close to the appropriate care, resources and hospital for the many medical appointments that would follow.

As both Breeze and Patrick required the use of a wheelchair, they spent endless hours searching for accessible housing that could accommodate their current and anticipated needs. As they settled into their new home, they would soon be connected with their care coordinator, Sabrina, who has shared just how fortunate she feels to be part of their journey.

While bittersweet, one thing that has come from their connection to Toronto’s Sick Kids is finally receiving a diagnosis for some of Breeze's conditions that she's been enduring. They were surprised to learn that one of these diagnoses meant that Breeze is one of three known cases in the world. Hearing this help Sue and David. Although research and awareness remain limited, they knew that they were connected to a care team well position to support Breeze. This lack of information also led Sue to document everything she could over the past decade to help the team and others, while reflecting on Breeze's many achievements.

As foster parents, they have worked incredibly hard to understand, navigate and partner with several agencies from across the health and social sectors and the added challenges that came when Patrick and Breeze transitioned to adult services. This meant needing to coordinate and familiarize all new providers and partners with their children's unique needs, relentless in their advocacy to ensure they are best supported.

In addition to the strong sense of independence they have instilled throughout their lives, Sue and David have respectfully fostered and encouraged Patrick and Breeze's deep pride and connection to their Indigenous heritage, culture, family and communities.

Sue and David take every opportunity to celebrate their children's many accomplishments and with their unwavering support, both Breeze and Patrick graduated from high school. Patrick went on to post secondary education and following his college graduation, has expressed an interest in mental health and counseling.

These celebrations and birthdays are always extra special. They are a gift and so they don't hesitate to go big, not knowing what each day will bring, they strive to make every moment count and focus on spending as much time together as they can.

As Breeze, now 24, requires full time care, she and Sue spend their days together following a complex routine, finding opportunities that encourage independence and autonomy wherever they can. They balance appointments and therapies with special hobbies and activities like puzzling, where Breeze's keen eye is something that will never cease to amaze Sue.

Breeze has an infectious smile, immense empathy, and a great sense of humor, which she demonstrates through her love of pranks with David often on the receiving end. When reflecting on their journey, David shares, “Sue and I have had each other for the first 15 years together. With children, your priorities change and I just want to be there for my family. Happiness is always my goal.”

And this happiness is felt when David and Breeze have their excursions a few times a month, like shopping, breakfast, or even going to get her nails done. There's also trips to Toronto to see plays like Phantom of the Opera and Frozen after seeing how much she enjoys the theater.

This also provides a reprieve for Sue, with David ensuring his wife and partner of 36 years is getting the time she needs for herself. While hesitant at first, Sue has found this much needed respite just as important for her as it is for Breeze.

Within her submission, care coordinator, Sabrina, who has celebrated many milestones with the family, shared her admiration for Sue and David. She told us, “They have been incredible partners in care” and that they do so with patience and grace and ongoing commitment to providing their children with exceptional day-to-day care and the best lives possible.

For Sue, David and their family this feeling is absolutely mutual as they echo the same sentiment and what it has meant to have Sabrina supporting them over the last 11 years. They told us, “We just love Sabrina. She fought for us so many times. I cannot say enough good things about her. We are so fortunate to have her.”

When we asked Sue to reflect on their caregiving journey and preparing her story, she said to us, “It's very difficult to put into words. It's been a great journey and learning how to dance within the experiences. We have no regrets. We never look back. We always face forward. We have created our own little world of happiness.”

Thank you for going Above and Beyond!