



Charity helps boy get new custom-fit wheelchair

Garland: Variety funds custom-fit chair to meet his special needs

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By **BRIDGET BARRY THIAS** / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News
Bridget Barry Thias is a Carrollton freelance writer.

For William Hardeman, a Garland 4-year-old with cerebral palsy, happiness was a custom-fit wheelchair.

For his parents, who have health insurance and too high a middle income to qualify for government assistance, it was enough of a financial boost to make the wheelchair possible.

Variety of North Texas provided that boost.

"Variety's program is awesome because we needed some help, but because we both work, we didn't qualify for any public or state assistance," said his mother, Wendy Hardeman.

Her sister cares for William while she is at work, but Mrs. Hardeman still has to take many unpaid days off to take her son on doctor visits.

"The Hardemans typify the type of families Variety is supporting," said Lawrence Hood, executive director of Variety North Texas.

"They both have jobs and insurance. But when you are raising two children, one of which has a physical handicap, it is difficult to provide everything necessary to ensure the child has the best equipment to have a sense of personal freedom. Variety's programs are designed to assist families who slip through the cracks."

In addition to helping provide the wheelchair and a custom-fit walker, Mr. Hood also arranged for William to throw out the first pitch at a Texas Rangers game Sept. 4. William is an avid baseball fan and plays in the Buddy League, in which children with disabilities are assisted by teen volunteers.

Born prematurely, William spent six weeks in a neonatal intensive care unit.

An ultrasound exam detected a spot on his brain, and an MRI confirmed that he had cerebral palsy.

"His condition affects his legs," his mother said. "His upper body is strong, and he has a good range of motion."

A physical therapist works with William twice a week to exercise his muscles so he might control them better.

His parents hope his disability won't worsen or begin to affect more of his body.

"We learned from his physical therapist about Variety," Mrs. Hardeman said.

"She told us they could possibly help pay for the wheelchair, which can range in cost from \$4,000 to \$10,000. We have

insurance that would cover 80 percent of the cost, and Variety covered the rest. They also helped us get a gait trainer."

William is enrolled in the Garland school district's Public Preschool for Children with Disabilities program. He had a smaller wheelchair and walker that the school district provided, but the new wheelchair is a better fit.

Plus, it's personalized – with a baseball monogram on the back.

"The people at Variety were fantastic, friendly and always kept me informed of our status and answered our questions," Mrs. Hardeman said. "William is ecstatic about his new wheelchair."

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bbthias@aol.com