

## Patient Profile

### ONE OF THE FIRST BATHURST OUTREACH CLINIC PATIENTS



### ALEX, 14 YEARS OLD

Alex was five years old and wheelchair bound when he came to the first outreach clinic in Bathurst in October 2002. According to his physicians, he would not be able to walk and his future would be regulated by his immobility. In Fall 2011, he ran a 5 km race and in April 2012, he won a gold medal in swimming.

*"Before, I saw the things I couldn't do and now I see all the things I can do... one step at a time."*

Alex and his twin brother, Adam, were born prematurely at 26 weeks on June 22, 1997. Both suffer from cerebral palsy, but Alex is more affected and requires more attention and care. His condition prevents him from getting around like other children his age. Many visits to physicians proved hopeless for Alex and the Guignard-Stever family of Bathurst.

Diane Guignard, Alex's mother, attended a lunch and learn in Bathurst where a Shriner talked about the treatments offered at Shriners Hospitals for Children – Canada in Montreal. After the presentation, a friend who went with her said that a clinic with a specialist and a nurse from the Montreal hospital would soon be held in Bathurst and that she should bring her son for a consultation.

In October 2002, she went to the clinic and finally got the answer she was hoping for. Dr. François Fassier, then chief surgeon at Shriners Hospitals for Children- Canada, examined Alex and told her that her five-year old son had cerebral palsy, which prevented him from walking, and that Shriners Hospitals treat patients like him with surprising results.

Diane could not believe what she was hearing. A month later, Alex came to the hospital in Montreal for tests and meetings with the multidisciplinary team that included physicians, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, nurses and social workers. All these people just for Alex!

Life for Alex and his family changed overnight. In July 2003, Alex had surgery on his legs and was hospitalized for two months. A long rehabilitation process began. The physiotherapists became his best friends and he loved playing in the hospital's recreational park.

Two months later, he returned to Bathurst with several orthopaedic accessories including a walker, crutches, external prostheses as well as a ton of stuffed animals as a reward for his efforts. With regular visits to Montreal for medical follow-ups, he continued his rehabilitation at the IWK Health Centre in Halifax and the Stan Cassidy Centre for Rehabilitation in Fredericton. His courage and perseverance led to success. Today, he walks, plays the piano and swims. He ran the 5 km "Legs for Literacy" race in fall 2011 to raise money for literacy programs at regional schools. In 2012, at 14 years old, he was awarded a gold medal in swimming.

"Alex used to need help with simple activities like showering, getting dressed or opening a door," his mother said. "Now, he has reached an unexpected level of independence."

Alex will turn 15 on June 22 and is looking for a summer job. "Before, I saw the things I couldn't do and now I see all the things I can do... one step at a time," exclaimed Alex with his bright, cheerful eyes.

In July 2012, he will participate in a 3.2 km swim in Tracadie, New Brunswick, to make another dream come true: swimming in the ocean!