

Showing true GRIT

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it's about abilities, not disabilities

Partner lends a helping hand

Kevin Maimann
Examiner Staff

Corporate partnerships are becoming increasingly important for local non-profits.

A \$15,000 fundraiser put on by CPI Construction last year allowed the Getting Ready for Inclusion Today (GRIT) program to barely break even.

CPI is hosting its second annual wine tasting and silent auction fundraiser Friday at Muttart Conservatory to support the program, which helps build independence in children aged two to five with disabilities.

"Had we not had CPI, we would have had a \$15,000 deficit. That's just the reality," says GRIT executive director Barb Reid.

"We have to break even every year. I feel like CPI has adopted us. You sort of feel like you're floundering and then someone offers you this lifeboat."

CPI got involved with GRIT after VP

Jayson Barclay met with a site superintendent who was struggling to afford a bassinet stroller for his disabled son Nolan.

"I went back to the office, a little bit of a tear in my eye, wrote him a cheque and said, 'Go get your son the stroller,'" Barclay says. "That was about six months before we decided as a company ... we've done well, we've benefited from our economy. It was time to give back."

After finding out Nolan was a GRIT client, Barclay got involved with the program and is now a board member.

Reid says GRIT has been struggling in recent years because the province has frozen special-needs funding while boosting wages for health workers.

This spring, its board of directors discussed for the first time the possibility of cutting services to the 81 families it serves, if it is not able to boost its fundraising dollars.

That could mean ordering less specialized equipment to help its young clients communicate, or rolling back its programming hours from five half-days a week to four.



KEVIN MAIMANN
CPI Construction partner Jayson Barday poses with Getting Ready for Inclusion Today executive director Barb Reid.
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"That's alarming for families. We don't want to scare people, but we have to work within our means," Reid says.

"The constant struggle is to maintain increases to salaries that everyone is entitled to, with no increases in funding."

GRIT has a Hope and Harmony fundraiser coming up in February, as well as a casino and an Oilers 50/50.

The program has grown to include 81 kids this year.

GRIT team members, which include occupational and physical therapists and speech and language pathologists, care for kids at home, in pre-school, daycare and kindergarten in order to help them overcome disabilities and integrate with their fellow students.

Families decide in Grade 1 whether to follow through with inclusive education for their child or choose a special education program.

Reid says a main goal of GRIT is to allow parents to find their child's true potential.

"If we raise the bar, children rise to that. If we keep it low, that's what they achieve," she says. "Our approach is to say we don't know a child's full potential, so we will assume it's limitless."

Friday's fundraiser starts at 7 p.m. To learn more, visit gritprogram.com.