

Halloween "change" is in the bag



By Brock Weir

Wise trick-or-treaters will check their bags and pillow cases carefully next Thursday night after bringing home their Halloween haul ? you could have a paper coin mixed in amongst the candy and chocolate.

A paper coin doesn't sound like much, but it could mean a world of difference to kids across Ontario this year who might need a helping hand. And, if luck is on your side, the coins could translate into some cool prizes for you as well!

Alexander, 10, wouldn't mind scoring the first prize ? a weekend stay at Great Wolf Lodge ? for his, and nine other families ? but right now he's focused on getting these ?coins? out to make as many people as possible to make a difference through the Change for Kids program, spearheaded by Toronto's Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Program.

An Aurora resident, Alex knows firsthand how even a small bit of help can make a world of difference for kids and their families hoping to get back on their feet at Bloorview. When he was in Grade 1, the Pickering College student came down with bacterial meningitis. After initial diagnosis at Southlake Regional Health Centre, followed by surgery at Sick Kids where doctors removed a portion of his cerebellum. He then spent months at Bloorview learning how to walk again.

?In recovery at Bloorview, I remember learning those skills again and just getting back to normal,? Alexander recalls.

He doesn't remember much about the early days of his illness, aside from confusion not just of what he was going through, but the flurry of activity going on around him. He nevertheless remembers vividly the fun activities and lessons ? from riding tricycles down hospital hallways and zooming along on scooters ? they provided to get him back to his old self.

?After they removed a portion of his cerebellum, it was a matter of getting his balance back,? says Alexander's mother, Heather, noting Alex defied all doctors' expectations by being able to lead a full life of running, skiing, fishing, and public speaking, all with possible eye towards acting.

?After we came through the whole experience ? and you don't breathe at all when you're going through it ? we came home, Alex went back to school, and we could finally exhale and ask, ?what can we do?' He came out very well in this situation against all odds. Nobody thought he would get back to his regular life.?

Part of their solution was giving back. Heather volunteers down at Bloorview two days a week in their family mentorship program, which helps families learn the ropes and possible issues they might encounter down the road, as well as their classroom which helps patients in Grades One through Six keep up with their school work while they are in their care, a therapeutic play room for zero-to-six-year-olds, and a junior school.

Now, through the Change for Kids program, they, along with several other patients from across Ontario, are able to give back at the local level to the hospital which got their own and countless other families back to normal or used to their new normal.

Change for Kids coins are available in books of 20 for \$5 through Scotiabank locations throughout the GTA, as well as Costco and Toys R Us. Each coin handed out on Halloween has a unique PIN and while in between handfuls of chocolate, kids and their parents can enter the PINs online to see if they have won. For every PIN code entered online, Scotiabank will donate a further \$5 to Bloorview.

More than 500 prizes will be up for grabs before the final prize draw on November 23.

From a parent perspective, what I always liked about this is you were handing out something that wasn't candy, says Heather. It is something fun to do on Halloween that is not all about the candy, sweets and treats. It is something exciting and then on Halloween night, the kids go home the next day and they can enter them all and see if they won anything.

They learn about Bloorview and the exposure to kids with disabilities is important too in creating that culture of acceptance and tolerance.

For more on Change for Kids, visit www.changeforkids.ca.