

THREE STRANDS STRONG

From the worst kind of family tragedy comes a great gift to the community

The Bible says, "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves," and, "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." (Ecc. 4:12)

Camas residents Karen Goulding-Hendricks and her husband, Jeff Hendricks, experienced this truth and the strength found in community after the birth of their second child, daughter Alexi. The pretty, blue-eyed baby with developmental disabilities died at just 22 months of age.

After they learned Alexi had no sight, Karen and Jeff sought help from the Arc of Clark County. The 70-year-old nonprofit has a program called PRIDE for Kids, serving children with disabilities from birth to 3 with family-centered therapy and special education.

PRIDE recognizes that the world is different for children with disabilities and is able to put a bit of normal into the lives of those facing unique challenges. Whereas people would do a double-take of Alexi in public places, at PRIDE, everyone was on the same page. Alexi once had a seizure in the grocery store checkout line. The people nearby ignored the seizure entirely. There was no offer of help.

Karen understands that people often don't know what to do or how to react to disabilities. In contrast to that experience is being around families with similar situations.

Being at PRIDE, "you feel normal," she said. "It's a weird thing when you enter the world of disabilities. It's like joining a club that nobody chooses to join. But the people are amazing — incredibly kind. And they help you navigate the system," she added.

One of her thoughts when Alexi died was, "Oh, no. I'm going to

lose this community," she said. That did not happen. In fact, Karen Goulding-Hendricks is now an Arc board member and the couple are leading the group to new heights.

A family picnic area is now rising on the same site where Alexi's memorial service was held. "Of all the places Alexi went, this was the place she was happiest," Karen said. The picnic area is part of an ambitious landscaping project the couple came up with to honor their daughter's memory and expand the place that brings some sense of normal to families facing such difficulties.

Stop by the site at 6511 N.E. 18th Street, and you'll see in the making a safe, outdoor play space for young children. And you might come across handfuls of volunteers helping the project, many with the assistance of Hewlett-Packard's generous volunteer outreach program in which employees are paid for volunteer service.

Visit www.arcfamilycenter.org for information about getting involved monetarily or otherwise.

The grounds will be used by PRIDE families. Included will be an outdoor classroom, gardens, a water feature, sound garden, mobility trail, and a custom-made playground catering to kids 0-3. Most playgrounds are built for children ages 2-5 or 5-12, Karen and Jeff learned. The one being built for Arc's family center also brings in additional safety features.

As Arc board member Kay Parks said of the Hendricks family, "I don't believe I would have the courage that they have to move forward in such a magnificent fashion."

Meanwhile, Karen Goulding-Hendricks gives credit to PRIDE, which was and still is a place of refuge for them. A cord of three strands is not easily broken.

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