

## The King Family

## “Time for the Good Things”

Imagine caring for eleven kids. Now imagine caring for eleven kids, most with severe physical and mental disabilities, with several in wheelchairs.

Esther and Frank King didn't intend to take on that immense challenge. But while volunteering in Haitian orphanages or working as foster parents, they kept encountering kids that desperately needed loving parents and a good home.



“Most of these kids had suffered horrible abuses and sickness and pain. I knew I could give them better than they would get anywhere else,” says Esther, whose sunny yellow top matches her warm—and obviously extraordinarily generous—disposition.

Taking these kids on has meant dealing with everything from muscular dystrophy to fetal alcohol syndrome, deafness to seizures and shaken baby syndrome, not to mention serious psychological trauma—all at the same time. But Esther's biggest problem wasn't dealing with her children's various handicaps—it was actually transportation.

“Just getting the kids from point A to point B was really difficult,” she says. The family had converted an older mini-bus into a family vehicle, but it still couldn't carry the kids in wheelchairs. The vehicle was also a huge financial drain. “I was spending \$250 a week in gas just to drive around Chilliwack,” says Esther. “And that was before gas prices went way up! It cost me \$150 to go into Vancouver, and sometimes I was going in four times a week to see specialists with the kids,” she says.

The family's three-level home also presented serious difficulties. While large, it wasn't designed for wheelchairs. “When we adopted these kids, they were not wheelchair dependant. We found out after we adopted them that they had conditions that would made them wheelchair dependant,” Esther explains.

The children who use wheelchairs are confined to the main floor, where there was only a small bathroom. The space was so awkward, once Esther wheeled a child into the bathroom, she was essentially trapped there with them. Furthermore, as the kids grew, it was becoming impossible for Esther to lift them from the wheelchair into the tub—which meant they weren't getting bathed as often as they should have been. “People would look at me disrespectfully. Some would actually say, ‘Why don't you bathe your kids?’ It was just horrible,” she says, wincing.

For the kids in wheelchairs, even play was problematic. The main play space was on the second floor. “So the able-bodied kids would go upstairs to play, while the disabled kids would sit at the bottom of the stairs. That was heartbreaking,” says Esther.

The King family got funding from Giving in Action's Family Independence for a vehicle and for renovations for the main floor. They bought a mini-van, and modified so it can carry two wheelchairs. They also sacrificed their two-car indoor garage in order to

expand the main floor bathroom, create a play area on the main floor, and add a bedroom for thirteen-year old Angel, who is in a wheelchair.

“I don’t want anyone at Giving in Action to underestimate how much this has meant to me,” says Esther. Her voice chokes with emotion. “I honestly don’t think I’d still be functioning, if we hadn’t gotten the help,” she says softly, when can speak again.

“The bathroom has made my life 200 per cent easier. It means now I can do things I just didn’t have time to do before. Just to have a bathroom where I can maneuver Angel properly is amazing. There’s even enough space so she can do some things by herself, and she’s blossoming ... She’s taking more interest in how she wants her hair, what earrings she wants. They are all things a teenage girl should be doing. But there just wasn’t room for that kind of stuff before,” Esther says. “The van has also been a life-saver. I don’t know how we could have coped with the old bus, with gas prices this high.”

The benefits of the grant extend to other families as well. “I invite families with special needs kids over, and I can do that because I have the resources to support the special needs kids, like the bathroom, the play area, and the mini-van,” Esther explains. “How often can a kid with special needs go on a play date? It just doesn’t happen. But with the resources Giving in Action has given me, I can make it happen for them.”

In the King family home, pictures of the kids cover the walls. Their handprints, from tiny to large, decorate a door in the kitchen, and the children’s heights are all marked on an adjacent doorway. The love evident in the home is almost palpable. With the grant from Giving In Action, this extraordinary family now can spend less time on logistics, and have more time for the good things in life.