

Townsend family

Raising an appetite for life

Can an elevator elevate your appetite for life?

For the Townsend family, putting in a residential lift not only gave Alex Townsend access to the upper floor of their home, it also restored his appetite—not just for food, but also for living. Alex is a sixteen-year old paraplegic who gets around in a wheelchair. Unfortunately, in his home, the kitchen and living room are upstairs and were not wheelchair accessible. So the family used to carry Alex to the second floor so the family could eat meals together. But Alex’s bones are also extremely fragile, and after too many accidental breaks, his parents decided transporting him up the stairs was just too risky.

After that, “Alex ate in his bed or at the computer desk downstairs. I had to take every drink, every piece of food to him,” his mother Karen Townsend explains. That isolation from his family added to the social separation Alex already felt because of long recovery times for surgery to address his severe scoliosis, as well as a protracted superbug infection. Teenage boys are supposed to have insatiable appetites, but Alex grew disinterested in eating; twice, he even had to be fitted with a feeding tube to provide him with adequate nutrition.

After Giving in Action helped pay for the lift, Alex can not only have meals with the family, “... he can have Christmas with us. He can hang out when guests come over. He can be part of the family in a way he couldn’t before,” says Karen.

While the lift helped Alex connect with his family, other changes funded by Giving in Action have helped him become more independent. For the first time in his life, Alex has his own bedroom. “His friends can come over and spend the night, which they couldn’t really do when he was sharing with his 12 year old brother,” says Karen. “Since he no longer has to be so dependent on us, Alex is really coming into his own.”

The residential lift, new bedroom and wheelchair-accessible bathroom have also helped other members of the family. Karen is now able to leave the house for hours at a time. Alex’s 20-year old brother Anthony, who did a lot of caregiving, has felt able to move out on his own. And Alex’s younger brother can let go of a lot of the caregiving responsibilities he had taken on. Karen hopes the renovations herald a new era for Alex and his family, and she’s deeply grateful to Giving in Action. “It’s all made such a difference, and we could never have afforded to do it on our own,” says Karen.