

'It definitely touches my heart'

Rotary Home nears completion thanks to \$6.8M in fundraising

BY KATIE DAUBS

Kindness is not listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange. Lance Jefferies knows that.

In the midst of job cuts and economic gloom, the construction of a place of respite — for his family and 160 others who have children with a physical disability — is almost complete, with more money than fundraisers ever hoped for. The Ottawa Rotary Home Foundation has so far raised \$6.84 million. The goal was \$6.5 million.

And this past weekend, Mr. Jefferies' coworkers from Hydro Ottawa helped install a power line with company equipment, on their own time.

"It definitely touches my heart," said Mr. Jefferies, whose 18-year-old son, Brett, has a severe form of cerebral palsy. "It's certainly made me quite proud."

The 20-bed facility on Bank Street, south of Leitrim Road, will open in January. It will include a child and adult wing — which is a first. At the old Rochester Street location, families could only receive respite care for their child until he or she turned 21. The facility accommodates children and teenagers so their parents can run errands, attend hockey tournaments, or go on a vacation — things other families take for granted.

"It's been very difficult to see those young people turn 21," said Carolyn Piché, the director of development. "It's like saying goodbye to your nieces and nephews. To look at the parents and say, 'We can't help you anymore.' I can't tell you how hard it is."

She said the idea to "do more" was conceived 13 years ago, and "a dedicated group of volunteers have found a way to make this project happen."

Lesley Jefferies, Brett's mother and main caregiver, said the new adult wing is a



DAVID KAWAI, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Brett Jefferies, who has a severe form of cerebral palsy, and his mother, Lesley, watch as work nears completion on a new facility on Bank Street, south of Leitrim Road, funded by the Ottawa Rotary Home Foundation that will be a place of respite for children and adults with physical disabilities. Volunteers from Hydro Ottawa helped install a power line with company equipment, on their own time.

huge relief.

At eight months old, the Jefferies noticed Brett had developmental delays. A pediatrician diagnosed him with lissencephaly, a rare brain disorder that means "smooth brain syndrome."

The doctors speculated it was the result of a virus in the second trimester. The doctors told the Jefferies Brett likely wouldn't live more than two years. He is now 18. He uses a wheelchair and has the capacity of an infant, but is ineligible for care at most children's facilities.

"It's a huge relief, knowing that with the new Rotary Home, he could continue with them," Mrs. Jefferies said. "It's made life so much easier knowing there's a place for him to go where he's so well looked after."

Brett has a 16-year-old brother and 13-year-old sister, and the family has used the Rotary Home since Brett was five. That way, they can go to movies, hockey games, and highland dance competitions.

"It's such a peace of mind," said Mrs. Jefferies.

Funding is secured for all

children under the age of 21 at the Rotary Home, but then it becomes more complicated, and individualized, meaning only certain people qualify.

"A part of what we'll be doing in the next year is approaching corporations or foundations to sponsor weeks at the home," Ms. Piché said, adding it costs \$15,000 for eight people to stay at the home for a week.

She said the provincial government gave a \$2-million grant for the capital project, but can't support the operating costs of the adult wing.

"Unfortunately economic

times being what they are, they can't support new programs. So for the families who are struggling to keep their heads above water, it is incumbent on us to find ways for them to use the services," she said.

The extra fundraising money for the capital campaign will be used to furnish the home. Ms. Piché said they are still hoping to hit the \$7 million mark.

The final tally will be announced at the end of November. Anyone interested in donating, or helping with the campaign, can visit www.orhfoundation.ca or call 613-877-7376.