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For Immediate Release

‘Our Miracle Van’

HDNW is honored to connect neighbors to meet needs

When Bryan Williams became ill and lost use of his legs earlier this year, his wife, Adell, felt defeated. The couple already cares for Adell’s brother who has cerebral palsy and has become wheelchair bound. How can she manage them both? There are doctor appointments, shopping, trips to the pharmacy, and more.

“I felt like a door slammed shut,” says Adell. Her 5-foot stature and senior status left her wondering how she could physically manage the guys and their chairs. “I was feeling hopeless and closed in.”

While electric wheelchairs give the men the ability to move around the house, their doctor appointments had to be staggered. The chairs don’t fit in Adell’s small SUV. And living near the Antrim-Charlevoix County line means both public transportation systems are a bit out of reach, leaving an option for Adell to get one family member at a time to a nearby stop to catch the bus, which isn’t feasible much of the Northern Michigan year.

“Even before the electric wheelchairs, I had great difficulty just getting them into the car,” Adell adds.

The Answer

Community Connections is staffed by Community Health Workers, trained professionals who make it their business to know what medical and social services are available. They build relations and trust—both of which are crucial to connecting individuals and agencies who can help with residents who need help. The regional program covers a 10-county area with more than 310,000 residents.

Through a referral, Bryan and Adell Williams, and their brother, Wayne Fox, became involved with Community Connections, [an HDNW program that helps](#) area residents with needs such as food, shelter, and transportation. When the program’s HUB Coordinator and Community Health Worker Jen Vollmer received a call that a local resident had a van—fully equipped with an electric wheelchair lift—to donate, she was shocked.

“The family really couldn’t go anywhere other than doctor appointments due to the issues with transportation,” Jen says. “I’ve never had anything quite like this happen with Community Connections.”

“We were always home,” Adell says. “I had to get someone to come in and sit with whoever I wasn’t taking to an appointment. Our lives revolved around going to the doctor.”

In mid-May, the white van was delivered to the Williams and Fox family. Another family member helped cover insurance and the day they put the new license plate on was a day of celebration.

HDNW is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego counties.



Proud member of the [Northern Michigan Public Health Alliance](#): 7 local health departments advocating for public health.

“It’s our miracle van,” Adell says, her voice rich with emotion. “I tell everybody who will listen that I asked for a miracle and that my Go Fund Me account wasn’t doing well, so unless God dropped a van down, we weren’t going to get one. We can’t believe it’s ours!”

Paying It Forward

The lift van was previously owned by Charlevoix resident Sam VanderHeide. He purchased it when they needed it to help transport his wife, Julaine, who had multiple sclerosis. Julaine has since passed, and Sam now has a guardian who helped him facilitate the donation with family support. It’s their way of continuing to share Sam’s giving heart.

Now the Williams and Fox family can schedule joint doctor appointments, go sit in the park, grocery shopping together, and even occasionally eat out.

“My brother really brightens up. He dresses up to get out of the house,” Adell says. “We talk about how we can pay it forward someday. We are so grateful. It’s been life changing.”

Do you or someone you know need assistance? If so, local referrals can be easily made [here](#).

Cutlines:

- (From left) Bryan and Adell Williams, and their brother, Wayne Fox, consider the lift van donated to them by Sam VanderHeide their “miracle van.”
- Inside the van.

Broadcast Media: There is a video of Bryan Williams using the lift available upon request.

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