

## People of all ages need barrier-free homes

By Kate Chung, Accessible Housing Network\*

Pamela Andrews struggled to get her 13-year-old son in or out of their downtown Toronto apartment. Eventually it became necessary to place him in a group home, which, luckily, was in their neighbourhood.

“The small lip on the threshold was very difficult to navigate in the power wheelchair”, she says. “It doesn’t look big, but it made it very difficult to enter, and Aidan couldn’t get into the apartment by himself. I had to turn him backwards and push the chair in while the power was on full throttle.”



**PHOTO - DSC04071.JPG**

**Aidan in wheelchair at lip on threshold in entrance**

The only entrance to the apartment is from an outdoor hallway. Pamela explains, “Yes, snow has to be shovelled on our outdoor hallways. Aidan’s wheelchair is pretty good in a few inches of snow, but not all wheelchairs are.”

Aidan, who has cerebral palsy and does not speak, is working toward learning to walk. At home, he hitched himself along the floor, and had learned to get into bed.

Life would have been much easier if their apartment had been barrier-free from the time Aidan was younger, and Pamela wishes they had a bigger apartment where a larger walker would fit. She needs a larger space with a roomy foyer. If they had had a larger bathroom with the possibility of installing a lift to help her move Aidan into and out of the bathtub as he was grew heavier, she might have been able to keep him at home longer.



### **Small bathroom inadequate for Aidan's needs IMG\_0167.jpg**

As they live in a rented co-op apartment, it is not possible to do much in the way of renovations. She has made only minor modifications to the apartment, such as easy-to-turn handles on the bathroom sink. The bathroom entrance is too small for Aidan’s wheelchair.



**Pamela and Aidan in their kitchen IMG\_0171.jp**

Pamela would like to have a kitchen with a counter designed so Aidan's wheelchair can access it, as Aidan loves to help cook.

Pamela expresses appreciation for the support of neighbours. The co-op replaced the carpet with laminate flooring so Aidan could use his walker, re-did the foyer to protect it from denting by the wheelchair, provided extra storage space for his equipment, and put in new doors with easy to open lever handles. Because she does not own the apartment, she has been unable to get renovation funding.



**PHOTO - DSC04066.jpg**

**Aidan's wheelchair barely squeezes through the doorway**

Pamela says that she has community in the co-op, where she knows everyone. “I did consider moving at one point to an accessible apartment. We would have to get on a waiting list, wait a few years (until someone died likely). But then Aidan would become an adult, and my daughter and I would have to move again. Stability is important for me. Plus I like this building. We have a community here in this neighbourhood and in this building. So I stay. It's wasn't great for Aidan, but it's good for our family.”

She worried: “ When Aidan is older, he will need his own universal design place. - But where can he go?” For now, he is well cared for in his nearby group home.

\*The Accessible Housing Network (**AHN**) is a non-partisan network of Canadian non-profit organizations working to support the human rights of elders and all persons with disabilities to end the extreme lack of accessible housing.

[AccessibleHousingNetwork.org](http://AccessibleHousingNetwork.org)