

Spenser's Heart fundraiser to be launched on Oct. 3

In 2013, the car accident that took the life of six-year old Spenser McFadyen shocked and saddened the community. Since then, the memory of the young boy has lived on, spurring two local charities designed to support children; Spenser's Kids, which raises funds for those who cannot afford to play hockey, and Spenser's Heart, a charity launching on October 3.

Earlier this year, Spenser's sister Priscilla, who was seriously injured in the crash, passed away from a rare cancer, called Synovial Sarcoma, that was only discovered after a shadow was seen on her lung during x-rays following the accident.

Priscilla said that something good had to come of all this, so we started working on a project in Spenser's memory," said Brittany Plooard, Priscilla and Spenser's older sister.

The idea behind Spenser's Heart is to provide a safe place where kids can go and spend some time distracted from the craziness of life that they have to deal with when facing traumatic and difficult things in life. They came up with the idea of a lego room; Spenser had loved playing with lego, and often was distracted by his wonderous creations.

Priscilla's dream was to get Spenser's Heart officially going before she died, but her condition worsened more quickly than expected, and they were not able to launch it. They were, however, able to get everything in line for it to start - the general idea had been constructed and the plan was in place, they just had to put it into action.

Spenser's Heart provides a welcoming environment for kids facing a difficult time in their lives, to just hang out and play with lego in the Lego Room in Grand Valley.

Part of the initial idea came when Spenser's dad and I were going through our separation," explained Sharon Carter, mother of Spenser, Priscilla and Brittany. "It was very hard on him. We tried to find some form of counselling or help for him, but there was nothing around."

When they developed the idea of the Lego Room, they wanted to be able to provide a safe and neutral space for children to heal from traumatic events in their lives, as well as provide to provide a place to help families as well.

"It's not just for kids," explained Ms. Carter. "We have a social worker who will come in once a month just to talk to parents - it's not for counselling - to answer questions and provide resources.

She added that although there are trained volunteers who play with the children in the Lego Room and help encourage them, they also do not provide counselling.

"We do have counsellors available if the kids want someone to talk to, but our general, trained volunteers do not do any counselling with the kids," she said.

Spenser's Heart will officially open on Saturday, October 3, not only with their grand opening celebration, but also with a fundraiser - a Car Rally. The hope is that this rally will become an annual event, helping engage the public and bring awareness to their cause.

Although the non-profit is not officially opened yet, the support that they have received throughout the community has been overwhelming. Including a partnership with Caring Rehabilitation and Hospice Dufferin, there have also been different professionals and organizations who have helped with the development of the program.

"I can remember driving into Orangeville one day in a complete panic, thinking "Lord, what am I doing?" said Ms. Carter. "But everything has come together. God has things coming into place that we never could have done on our own. It's exciting, but it's also kind of terrifying."

The rally will begin at 9:30 a.m. on October 3 and is open to any kind of vehicle. The cost is \$40 a car, and will take the participating vehicles through a scenic tour of Dufferin and Simcoe County.

The rally will be followed by a BBQ lunch, silent auction and festivities at noon, which will include the official Ribbon Cutting Ceremony. The BBQ and celebration is open to the public.

Although the circumstances that led to the creation of Spenser's Heart have been difficult and heartbreaking for the family, it has helped knowing that something positive is coming out of the loss of Spenser and Priscilla.

"It's good that other kids are going to be able to benefit from this," said Ms. Plooard. "To know that there's somewhere that they can go to just be a kid and not have to deal with everything that's going on in their lives for a little bit."

For more information on the Spenser's Heart Lego Room, to register for the Car Rally, or to enroll a child in the program, visit www.spensersheart.com or contact them via email at info@spensersheart.com and phone at 519-217-5859. Spenser's Heart is currently looking for volunteers for different roles within the organization.