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Bulletin Magazine - Vol. 24 No. 6 - July/August 2022

KEEP ME HOME - THE STORY OF KAYLA POLLOCK (UPDATED SEPT 2022)

By Vicki Pinkerton

In early February, just after her third COVID-19 booster shot, 36-year-old Mount Albert resident Kayla Pollock 'lost her legs' and fell to the ground.

Kayla could not feel her legs or lower body and wondered what the heck was going on. Within half an hour all was normal, but she thought she should see someone. Appointments are hard to come by though and the next 'spell' lasted 45 minutes. She decided she needed to see a neurologist and made an appointment with her doctor to get a referral. She never got to see either because on February 22 she woke up paralysed from the neck down and had difficulty breathing.

She called to her service dog Fynn who raced downstairs to get her roommate and friend Dennis, who at the insistence of the big dog, went back upstairs and called 911.

After a long week in Emerg and an MRI, Kayla was diagnosed with Transverse Myelitis caused by lesions on her spine. The doctors told her the illness was a rare and life-altering side effect of the COVID-19 vaccination.

There have been several other people in Canada and around the world with similar reactions.

After four months in hospital and rehab Kayla is learning to live with incomplete Quadriplegia which leaves her with limited mobility in her upper body, weak arm and hand movement, complete paralysis in her lower body and excruciating nerve pain up and down her spinal cord. She will never walk again and has trouble breathing which is very common in this type of an injury.



Before February 22, Kayla worked part time at Robert Munch Public School in Mount Albert as a teaching assistant. A single mom to seven year old Mason, she also worked with exotic animals and trained dogs. Her passion was training service dogs and educating people about them through public speaking to groups and on TV and radio. She loved gardening and has an extensive exotic plant collection. She had a busy and active life.

When I met her, she had months in bed to contemplate her new life post hospital. If Kayla was wealthy there would be lots of options for private care and new treatments available but as a normal person, working at a job with no benefits, she is totally dependant on government generosity. OHIP has covered her hospitalization, but it does not cover modifications to a dwelling to make it accessible, wheelchairs, lifts or anything she will need at home. All of these things are prohibitively expensive and she has totally broken the bank to buy a few necessities that will allow her to move back into her house. There are a few programs to finance upgrades to an owned home but none of them are available to renters, and she is a renter.

In the time between the writing of this article and it arriving in your hands, Kayla will be discharged and sent home and she needs much help to make it work. If it doesn't, the next step would be, not to send her to a local group home where she would be close to her family and could continue to recover, because such a place doesn't exist. The only option the medical system currently has is to send her to the nearest nursing home with space. That nursing home would be the first one with an available bed within Ontario, not necessarily in York Region or even in the GTA.

Really? A Nursing Home. Kayla is 36, not 86. She needs family and people her own age. A nursing home is not appropriate.

There is no place at all there for seven year old Mason. Will he even be able to visit?

Before COVID, our medical system was struggling with many short comings. People with disabilities were feeling increasingly alienated from the society in which they live and Kayla's story shows the over-burdened system is not improving. When governments began to take down institutions, saying they would save money by accessing community services, it seemed like a good idea, but was that infrastructure ever built? If it was, it's under serious stress right now.

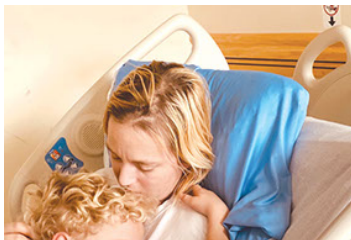
This isn't the place to begin a discussion about the medical system or how the drug companies need to be accountable to the people who are hurt by their product. That will take a lot of political will and community input although it would be great to know the discussion is starting. The bigger issue at least for Kayla, is she needs to be able to stay home to be the mother she wants to be. When I asked what she needed to be able to realistically stay at home in our community, she gave me a wish list of essentials and would-be-nice-to-have things. Here is that list, not necessarily in order of importance:

- Hands on help: In these first few days at home, she needs time to figure things out and for that she must have help with light household chores including some dog walking. If you have time or have a student who needs community hours, let her know through the address below.
- Friends: She needs her friends to find their way back to her. Lying in bed thinking of the worst that can happen is not healthy. She needs people to laugh with her and remind her life is worth living.
- A house: The home Kayla has been living in is on two levels. Ideally, she needs a place on a single floor that can be outfitted with a ramp and other things to make it an accessible home for her, her son and her amazing service dog.
- Trades people: People with knowledge to make her house more accessible.
- Lumber and supplies for revamping the house.
- Dog supplies and Vet costs: Fynn is a big boy and exactly what Kayla will need as she recovers. When she got him as a puppy, she trained him and had him certified as a legal Service Dog. He is trained to notice and alert her to a drop in her blood sugar because she has Type 1 Diabetes. He is also skilled in supporting and bracing his owner if needed so he will be doing double duty as her full time assistant. He needs walks, probably two a day, and large quantities of dog food. He is also ready for his annual veterinary visit for the usual stuff and perhaps a neutering.
- Wheel Chair Van: one she can get in and out of.
- Cards:
 - Gas cards to get her to appointments. Gas prices have skyrocketed and every little bit counts.
 - Meal cards
 - Netflix and Amazon cards so Kayla can read and have some company besides her overactive brain.
 - Cards for the supplements and medications that aren't covered by OHIP but are still important to healing.
 - A Global Pet Food or Pet Smart card for Fynn's needs.
 - Meal service cards.
- Gift Certificates: for any physical therapy that might help. None of the therapies she's getting in the rehab centre will be continued now that she's home. Certificates for Physio, massage and anything to help her body with its new reality. If she could find therapists willing to donate, that would be awesome.
- Respite help: Dennis, Kayla's roommate, has been doing the lion's share of care for both Kayla and Fynn despite his 12 hour a day job. Anything to make his life easier would benefit everyone.
- Donations: There is a Go Fund Me campaign. I will put the link to it at the bottom. You can also find it in Mount Albert Community Concerns on Facebook. Alternatively, you can also donate money by direct depositing to Kayla's RBC bank account. That way all your cash goes directly where it is needed. The address is at the bottom.
- Love and a team that believes in her to keep her going.
- Prayers: As a member of the Hillside Church, she needs prayers. I have seen the power of prayer and miracles happen. Several miracles would be useful here. If you have the inclination or ability, please pray, send energy and good intentions.
- Someone to coordinate: If people can help, it would be great to have someone who was able to schedule and know what was needed when.
- Also needed in large doses: Tell your friends about this. Put it on social media. Maybe you don't know anyone who can help but your friends might. Kayla could use a good lawyer, a wonderful PSW, someone who understands the system and can advocate for her. She is advocating for herself but much of the time, she is just too sick to do all of the reading and letter writing required. Any movement made on the way Kayla is treated within the medical system, will be a win for all of us. We will all do better if the approach taken is not just wonderful for the rich and well-insured.

These are the things that come immediately to mind but it's not all about things. Kayla desperately wants to keep her family together. The lovely dog Fynn who saved her life that day in February is so much a part of her she doesn't want to lose him. More than that, she told me, despite everything that's happened, the most important thing is to continue to be a mother to Mason and be a strong role model he can rely on. As a foster child who slipped through the cracks at every turn during her growing up years, Kayla wants to be there for him. She wants him to learn that even though life can be hard, anything can be overcome with faith and courage. Before life shifted, she had been teaching him he needed to respect everyone regardless of their outward appearance. Since she has been hospitalized, Mason has been acting this out by helping physically challenged kids on the playground.

An amazing role model indeed.

This has been a hard article to write. I usually take on light breezy subjects enjoyable to write and fun for you to read. I have spent hours since I met Kayla, contemplating her life and mine. What would I do if this was me or one of my kids? Not much. When you are one person against the medical system with a body that has shut down, you do what you can to get through it. Kayla is doing that with a great deal of grace and yet she is scared. What will the future bring? How will she mother her child? How will she cope? How would you?



Let's make it a community mission to keep Kayla home in Mount Albert, not in some out of the way nursing home, in, let's say, North Bay. She's been told she will never walk again although in time, she may have less pain if she's lucky. Once the healing is complete, she'll need to make new decisions. She obviously can't remain a teaching assistant with the York Board but with her courage and her experience, I think in 10 years, Kayla will be a person to be reckoned with. She'll have gone through this life-changing experience and won, but she can't do it without us.

To Donate:
Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/815416db> or find it in Mount Albert Community Concerns on Facebook.



To donate through direct deposit send your etransfer donation to kayla.pollock@me.com. You can also connect directly to Kayla through that email address. Be mindful that she can not always respond right away, so it may take a while for her to get back to you.

UPDATE SEPTEMBER 2022:

By Vicki Pinkerton

In July I wrote about Kayla Pollock's plight having reacted to her 3rd COVID vaccine shot with Transverse Myelitis which has caused Incomplete Quadriplegia, meaning she can't move anything below her neck in a useful way, probably for the rest of her life. At that moment, Kayla was still in the rehab hospital, trying to come to terms with her new life as the mother of a 7-year-old, with no way to support herself or her

child.

Today Kayla would like to thank those who've reached out to help her. She's been moved by the support she's received.

As mentioned in the past article, Kayla was worried about how she could live in her small 2 story home in Mount Albert. Once there, it became apparent the house was not adequate and she would have to find something else. Although her choice would have been to live in Mount Albert, close to her son's school, there was nothing available in town to meet her needs.

By the time you read this, the move will be complete. Unfortunately, in her new community, Kayla knows no one and has no support systems. She will be looking for a new church home in Bradford and people who can come in to spend time with her. Kayla's life has changed dramatically. She can no longer go out and meet her neighbours. She has no way of connecting with friends. She feels like she's been plunged into a dark cave of isolation and pain. If you can help by either continuing to visit her in her new home or by connecting her to your friends and family in Bradford, that would be great.

As someone who has met Kayla and watched the courage with which she is tackling this life-altering tragedy, it's my opinion that the two biggest things she needs are:

1. friendship and company every day and
2. someone who understands the medical system, pitfalls, cracks, crevices and all.

As she lies in bed all day, decisions are being made about her medical care and her disability payments she can not navigate and are not necessarily in her best interest. She needs an advocate who can plunge into the abyss and help her through it.

Kayla is brave and doing the best she can but none of us can battle the government and all its red tape on our own. If you know a lawyer or advocate who can help her reclaim some of her rights and dignity, or even if you know someone who knows someone, please pass her name along.

When asked, Kayla says, "People don't realize, our government does not support people with COVID vaccination injuries like mine. There is a massive waitlist for help, estimated today at over 5 years. As a result of the response to the last article and speaking out about my gofundme campaign, Ontario Disability threatened to cut me off forever if I don't document the funds, how they were used and why I need them. Unfortunately, due to my disability, I am too sick to even attempt to figure this out. I will have no income and no coverage for insulin or other life-saving medications I take due to my spinal cord injury. The government's answer is clear. Either long-term care or Medical Assistance In Dying which they offered me three times. Is that what the life of a disabled person is now worth in Ontario?"

She's right. The medical system is struggling right now but that is no excuse what's happening. This is about Kayla yes, but it's also about how the medical system is failing Ontarians.

For more information or to help please get in touch with Kayla through the Bulletin at info@thebulletinmagazine.com.

Vicki Pinkerton is a writer, teacher and creative life coach who lives on a small farm just outside of Mount Albert. She is a social hermit who creates novels and stories in her dungeon office and loves to sleep in when her puppy lets her. She gets out for interviews and to teach the occasional course. She loves the stories that make us who we are and is always looking for another happy ending.