NDAD'S MISSION:
Enhance the quality of lives of individuals facing health challenges.

Black belt HELP
NDAD's equipment loan program boosts Grand Forks teen's martial arts return

Survivor's early paraplegia journey
Minot shooting victim appreciates NDAD's medical equipment purchase

4 awards, 5th coming
A look at past Faye Gibbens Memorial Grant awards -- and a call for applications
Sarah Kay

NDAD's small role ‘made such a huge difference’ in teen’s surgery recovery

Extent of charity’s free durable medical equipment loan program surprises family

Ask those who know her well: Sarah Kay rarely is happier than when she's barefoot and wearing her dobok and black belt.

A dobok, the uniform of taekwondo, has for five years been Sarah's favorite garb.

She's passionate about that martial arts discipline, earning the rank of second-degree black belt by the time she turned 15. Now 17, Sarah successfully tested for her third-degree black belt in late August.

Whether she's on the mat at Grand Forks’ ATA Martial Arts as a driven, hard-working student in training or as a disciplined, purposeful junior instructor of both children and adults, the Red River High School senior exudes a sense of quiet, joyful confidence from the inside out.

“This is probably the most happy I’ve ever been,” Sarah said, smiling broadly.

So, imagine Sarah's frustration late last year and earlier this year when mounting hip pain, a delayed surgery and strict rehabilitation turned her martial arts passion into taekwon-NO.

“To have it taken away from her was devastating because she loves it so much,” mom Becky Kay recalled.

Now Sarah is back on the ATA mat, and en route she received an unexpected assist from NDAD’s Healthcare Equipment Loan Program (HELP).

The charity’s free service provided Sarah with several welcomed pieces of durable medical equipment to use during her recovery.

NDAD helped to ensure that Sarah’s recovery was thorough, safe and less painful.

“That was wonderful,” Sarah recalled. “(NDAD’s) was a small role, but it made such a huge difference.”

When hip wasn't cool

In her first several years at ATA Martial Arts, Sarah

“I love the fact that you can rent (durable medical) equipment at no cost for just such a temporary situation. It’s wonderful.”

Becky Kay
Sarah Kay's mom

Grand Forks’ Sarah Kay works with a young Tiger-level student participating in a self-defense drill at ATA Martial Arts.

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proved to be an impressively dedicated student, according to both her mom and ATA’s master instructor, Casey Mihalek. “She works very hard. She’s very smart. Really has a drive to improve herself,” Mihalek said. “When I first met her, she picked things up really quick.”

In a training environment the Kays say is fostered by Mihalek’s passionate enthusiasm and relentless positive reinforcement, Sarah rose from student to student assistant to assistant instructor. Her self-esteem, focus and confidence rose along with her self-defense skills, eye-hand coordination and physical flexibility.

Throughout it all, Sarah trained and taught her way through the soreness and bruises that invariably accompany participation in taekwondo and other athletic endeavors.

In late 2015, she recalls, while striving to improve one of her martial arts kick techniques, “I just took it way too literally and did it over and over,” to the point that felt discomfort in her right hip.

“I endured it,” she recalled. “Sucked it up.” Kept working on her kick. Sarah’s hip discomfort became so painful that it hurt her to do routine acts, such as sit in a chair. That caught her parents’ attention.

“She shows happiness but doesn’t like to show tears and pain,” Becky Kay said. “When she did, then I knew it was beyond the normal achy type pain.”

Physician examinations and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) showed Sarah had a tear of the labrum, the cartilage that cushions the hip joint and secures the top of the thighbone – femur – within the hip socket.

The Kays consulted with several medical specialists, including Dr. Christopher Larson, a Twin Cities orthopedic surgeon who has worked with the NFL’s Minnesota Vikings. Sarah chose to go with minimally invasive arthroscopic surgery.

“I just wanted to get it fixed,” Sarah recalls.

More HELP than expected

It wouldn’t happen quickly. The Kay family had to wait several months, until Jan. 12 of this year, before the busy Larson could perform Sarah’s procedure. Then, Sarah learned afterward, the surgeon discovered that her labral tear was larger than the MRI indicated.

“The head of my femur was shaped weird, I guess, so they also were trimming that down,” Sarah said.

She came out of surgery with “two little itty bitty scars,” adding crutches, pain and a rehabilitation regimen. Knowing Sarah’s eagerness to return to taekwondo, Becky Kay cautioned her daughter about the risk of re-injury by rushing too quickly back to training, or even by using crutches outdoors in winter.

“She was, like, ‘I just don’t want you to trip and fall with the snow and everything.’” Sarah said. “I was, like, ‘Mom, we don’t have a wheelchair.’ And she was, like, ‘Well, yeah, but there’s this cool place called NDAD and they can rent you that stuff.’ I was, like, ‘Oh.’”
Another ATA student – Don Santer, who happens to be NDAD’s chief executive officer – told Sarah what neither mom nor daughter knew: NDAD provides much more than wheelchairs, through HELP.

“We’re so grateful that (Santer) mentioned that,” Becky said. “We knew it would be hard for her to get around, but we hadn’t thought through” other challenges she faced in the bathroom.

As a result, Sarah and Becky borrowed a shower chair, toilet riser and wheelchair from NDAD.

The first two pieces of equipment were “a blessing to us,” Becky said, because Sarah’s pain would have been worse without them, and they also reduced the teen’s risk of falling or re-injuring herself in the bathroom.

Sarah appreciated being able to use the bathroom independently without assistance.

“Yes!” she said emphatically when asked whether the NDAD equipment helped. “I hate having to burden other people. These were things I could do and not have to worry about making my mom or my dad help me out.”

The wheelchair was used little, though – no fault of her mom’s good intentions.

“Funny enough, my physical therapist in Minneapolis told us I wasn’t allowed to use that wheelchair,” Sarah said. “He said, ‘You need to get stronger, and you need to use crutches.’ And I’m, like, ‘OK.’”

Both mom and daughter say they’ve since recommended NDAD’s HELP to other parents and even students, they said.

“If a child has a sport injury, they have that immediate need, and they’re wondering, ‘What can I do?’” Becky said.

“I love the fact you can rent equipment at no cost for just such a temporary situation. It’s wonderful.

“You most often don’t get something for nothing.”

‘Everything’s balancing out’

Healed and happy, Sarah is her full-steam-ahead self again, Becky said.

In addition to Sarah’s frequent taekwondo hours, she enjoys helping people as a nurse assistant intern at Altru Hospital. She aims to someday become an emergency room doctor -- maybe, in her “ideal, grown-up” scenario, an ER doctor who, on the side, teaches and further masters martial arts at a school that’s owned by her spouse.

“I’ve got my medical job now. I’ve got my taekwondo job. Everything’s balancing out. I’m almost graduated and then I can start college,” Sarah said. “You know, this is really a critical point in someone’s life.”

Sarah outgrew the anxious, defensive, sometimes bullied junior high nerd that felt so stressed. These days, she contently embraces her nerdiness, her passion for math, chemistry and reading, and her studiously driven 4.0 grade-point average.

Becky sees how Sarah has taken on many of Mihalek’s characteristics, and the respect she’s earned in turn.

“She is strong, she’s definitely independent and she’s just so alive. She has direction and purpose. . . . She has a lot of mental and personal strength now. . . . Everyone around us thinks she’s in college or older. Honestly! Because she just carries herself that way.”

NDAD & equipment loans

NDAD’s Healthcare Equipment Loan Program (HELP) loaned 786 pieces of durable medical equipment from its offices in Grand Forks, Fargo, Minot and Williston during April, May and June of this year.

HELP loans are free of charge and good for up to 90 days. Visit NDAD.org for more details.
A bullet fired by a home intruder last January ended Cody Davis’ ability to walk. It almost took his life, too.

The 24-year-old Minot man was shot through his spinal cord and lungs while descending the stairs of his two-story apartment in the wee hours of Jan. 7. By the time Cody regained consciousness days later in Trinity Hospital’s intensive care unit, he had survived critical condition with no small help from five separate resuscitations, he was told.

Cody still was left with paraplegia. He lost the use of his legs and with it considerable independence. It greatly complicated some of life’s most essential daily tasks -- two of which have since been eased with durable medical equipment purchased for him by NDAD.

Cody says he’s “definitely” grateful for NDAD’s help and other ways he’s been aided by family, friends and the community.

He’s also buoyed by another realization. While he no longer can walk, Cody said, “I came out of (the shooting) as me.”

With a highly uncertain life journey ahead, he leans on a victory he won’t be denied – something on which to build his future. That bullet couldn’t claim the rest of him, he says.

Not his feistiness. Not his street-savvy intellect. Not a sense of humor that favors TV’s “South Park,” film’s “Deadpool” and “snarky” British film dialogue, he says. Also still intact: Cody’s passion for playing video games with friends and his brother Trevor, 23, and for watching mixed martial arts (MMA) sports on TV. As a teen, Cody competed in combat sports with friends.

“You can learn a lot more from sparring with somebody than you ever can from a conversation,” Cody explained. “You know if someone’s a quitter or not. You know if somebody’s got heart. You know if somebody’s a coward or not.” He paused. “I like knowing that about people around me.”

Cody still is learning daily about the fight within himself.

“I died somewhere around five times, and I still came out of it cracking jokes. . . . .But I still came out of it like me. Know what I mean?”

Nicole Peltier knows. Cody’s mom, 42, sees his resilience and humor as powerful doses of hope – perhaps more potent than the daily cupfuls of pills he takes.

“It’s like my breakfast now, man,” he joked.

Cody, Trevor and their mom hope Cody’s humor, inner strength and fighting spirit helps move them away from irrevocable tragedy and toward a brighter future.

How NDAD helped
NDAD purchased a combination shower chair / commode on wheels for Cody.
Nicole was told NDAD “would be a good resource to have in our corner” from nurses and social workers at Fargo’s Sanford Health rehabilitation facilities, where Cody had been transferred after his mid-February release from Trinity Hospital.

“I just remember sitting there thinking and feeling so overwhelmed,” Nicole said. “Like, how are we going to afford this? What are we going to do? . . . I remember crying even.”

She contacted Marsha Dupré, NDAD’s client services representative in Minot, and quickly gained hope. “Marsha has been super good to us,” Nicole said. “Very welcoming. Very kind. So has the other staff. Very compassionate, kind and caring.”

NDAD soon approved Nicole and Cody’s application for assistance and spared them the stress of meeting yet another daunting expense since the shooting.

Cody’s shower chair / commode on wheels also gives him the opportunity to have an added measure of independence and privacy.

‘I thought I was losing my son’

Cody’s fiercely independent self sometimes makes accepting help difficult. “I went from having my freedom,” he said, “to needing help with everything.”

Part of that freedom came from income Cody made from the job he held at a convenience store, doing the books and handling other tasks.

Nicole’s caregiving in their shared, more accessible apartment has been a huge help, Cody said. “It was like the perfect chemistry of my mom being there to help me with stuff and me being too stubborn to give up.” Brother Trevor’s frequent presence has been a great help, too.

Nicole said she needs to live with Cody for a year or two until he gains more independence and “can figure some of this new life out” for himself. Then, she said, they’ll explore how to improve his mobility -- for example, with a hand-controlled assessible vehicle.

For now, she said, they’ll continue to “butt heads from time to time,” and she’ll strive to “just gently guide him. I’m trying to support Cody and not step on his toes as his mom.”

When Cody was shot, he and Nicole lived elsewhere in Minot, several doors apart in the same apartment building. Nicole says she heard the shot; she and a friend were the first to reach the scene. “I thought I was losing my son at that moment,” she recalled, fighting back tears.

About a month into his Minot hospital stay, Cody was told he wouldn’t walk again. “It took a while,” he said, “for it to all sink in.”

Paraplegia is a tremendous challenge for her former high-energy kid with a 100-mph pace, Nicole said. “I think it’s still very raw for us. Very raw,” she said. “And it’s a journey,” with good and bad days that seem to reach extremes.

Cody struggles at times with anxiety. Neither mom nor son sleeps well. She’s startled easily by even small, unexpected noises. “What bugs me more than anything,” Cody said quietly, “is how (the shooting) affected other people.”

In August, he was in the hospital several days to deal with an infection. Cody has had multiple surgeries and has at least one more ahead to remove wire that has helped to hold his sternum together.

But, he added, as if to boast, “I’ve got some pretty gnarly scars.”

Cody finds it weird he no longer feels “scared of stuff.” “I was scared of guns, so I went out and shot guns” on a shooting range. “And I had a fear of spiders, so I got Bob,” a pet tarantula.

Asked to hold Bob for a photo, Cody paused, for effect: “Hmmm. He hasn’t eaten in a while. I don’t know. . . .” Mom and son laughed.

Cody used to inwardly question his own courage, though he “was so bold and brash in my life that I kind of did whatever I wanted.” He paused. “I know for sure that I’m not a coward now. Came running down my stairs and got shot.”

Cody knows the next tests of his courage will come from the way he faces his future.
Grant recipients extend late NDAD co-founder’s passion

Faye Gibbens Memorial Grant awards to help North Dakota’s at-risk populations have been made by NDAD since its creation in 2015. Each award was $5,000.

Faye Gibbens would have been pleased. The grants pay tribute to the charity’s longtime program services leader who, with husband Ron, NDAD’s president, co-founded the organization more than 40 years ago. Faye died in 2014 at age 70.

Since early 2016 at Mayville State University, a Coffee Time mobile cart refreshment service (right) has helped to introduce and teach transitional life skills to older teens and young adults in the Griggs-Steele-Traill Special Education Cooperative. The campus Collegiate DECA marketing chapter teams with students in MSU teacher preparation studies, particularly for special education. The program received NDAD’s inaugural Faye Gibbens grant.

On Grand Forks’ near North Side, the second Gibbens grant award helped renovate Altru Family YMCA’s accessible playground (below) on the south side of its facility at 215 N. Seventh St. The playground portion was completed this summer and features play equipment and rubber surfaces that are more inclusive for kids with disabilities, including sensory challenges, and other special needs, such as wheelchair access. For now, the playground is in use only by YMCA-based child care programs. After some final improvements, the playground is expected to be opened this fall during designated times to neighborhood children and their families.

Call for grant applications

This fall, NDAD will award its 5th Faye Gibbens Memorial Grant to a North Dakota agency or organization. The money must be used for a health, welfare, social service or educational purpose for at-risk populations of any age.

Completed applications must be received at NDAD’s Grand Forks office no later than 5 p.m. Friday, Sept. 29.

The application packet is available in fillable PDF form at NDAD.org. Please use only the application space provided to answer the questions.

Once completed, print and mail the application form to NDAD, c/o Faye Gibbens Memorial Grant, 2660 S. Columbia Road, Grand Forks, ND 58201, Attn: Leslie Stastny.

Or, attach the completed form to an email addressed to lstastny@ndad.org.
The third Faye Gibbens grant was put to use in a mountain bike adventure therapy program for at-risk and traumatized teen boys and girls (below). Therapeutic working ranch Home on the Range, among the the Badlands near Beach, bought additional mountain bikes for its program. Using ranch trails and nearby Maah Daah Hey Trail, the adventure therapy activities teach children new and innovative ways to cope with stressful situations while learning how to appreciate the environment and be active physically. Youth in the program also gain bike maintenance skills and meet survival equipment needs.

Child Care Aware of North Dakota (CCAoND) is using NDAD’s fourth Gibbens grant award to purchase specialized materials, equipment and resources for care providers who have children with special needs or challenging behaviors. Participating providers get “best practice” coaching and consultation through CCAoND’s inclusion support service. The goal is to keep children with special needs in child care settings and ensure they’re included in activities with other children, instead of being left out because of lack of financial resources by providers or parents.

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NDAD is a nonprofit, charitable organization founded by concerned citizens to assist mentally and physically disadvantaged people in North Dakota, many of whom are not eligible for services from other agencies.

NDAD provides financial assistance through funds generated by both the organization and community projects. NDAD also provides information and referral services to help people receive assistance through other agencies, when possible.

*It’s AMAZING what people can do when there’s help.*