Power to live with mobility

NDAD helps preserve Fargoan’s independence

When Shirley Ann Robideau needed a new power wheelchair last year after Medicare denied her request, she ended up turning to NDAD. “I just didn’t know where else to go,” the 69-year-old Fargo resident said.

The charitable nonprofit helped Robideau, a widow who lives alone, get that power chair. That’s helped her maintain a life she appreciates living.

“I am so grateful to NDAD for coming to my rescue when they did,” she said. “I feel like they literally saved my independence.”

After she was denied a new chair, another non-profit, Freedom Resource Center of Fargo, suggested that Shirley contact NDAD, which since its founding has been an agency of last resort for many people with disabilities.

SHIRLEY
Continued to Page 2
Shirley Robideau, in the kitchen of her Fargo apartment.

Continued from Page 2

She reached NDAD client service representative Lora Machart, who proceeded to try to solve Robideau’s dilemma. Machart “was amazing,” Shirley recalled. “She knew I didn’t have anywhere to go when I called her.”

NDAD ultimately approved Shirley’s application for assistance. The chair supplier, Healthcare Accessories, provided a needed new seat cushion for Shirley at no extra charge.

“I did a lot of praying,” she said, “and everyone came through for me.”

“NDAD’s program is the most amazing I have ever seen,” Robideau said.

“Without my power chair, it would be almost, if not impossible for me to take care of myself independently.”

For most of her 69 years, Shirley has grappled to both obtain and then maintain her independence. She’s faced multiple challenges.

Shirley was born with deafness. She’s legally blind and can see only shadows. She has multiple food allergies. She deals with diverticulitis, osteoporosis and some arthritis. Her muscles continue to weaken.

When she was a 1½ year-old Casselton, N.D., toddler, she became one of thousands of Americans who contracted the highly contagious, sometimes deadly viral illness known as polio. “When I got it, I was paralyzed from my neck down,” Shirley recalled. When little Shirley finally left St. John’s Hospital in Fargo, it was with her legs in braces. She used braces until she was 13, and moved with crutches well into her 30s.

“I used to walk in a swing-through manner,” she said. “I couldn’t do one step at a time.”

Her progressively deteriorating vision wasn’t explained until 1984, when she was diagnosed with Usher’s syndrome. Hearing loss, peripheral vision loss and night blindness are symptoms. Shirley learned she had retinitis pigmentosa, or RT, a chronic disease that’s commonly found with Usher’s syndrome and also can be hereditary.

The following year, Shirley obtained what would be the first of multiple power wheelchairs, each of which she came to rely heavily.

When Robideau lived temporarily in Utah in 2012, an insurance company that dealt with Medicare helped her replace her worn power chair. She said it was too large and uncomfortable and its controls difficult for her to use. According to Shirley, the insurance company and Medicare said it was her responsibility.

She returned home to Fargo with only her old, worn power chair, which she had kept. She couldn’t afford the $2,000 bill to ship the new, ill-fitting chair home, so she left it behind.

By the summer of 2015, Shirley needed parts to fix her deteriorating old power chair, but she was informed those parts were unavailable.

SHIRLEY: Continued to Page 4

ARTICLE PHOTOS: Whitney Taylor
Healthcare Equipment Loan Program

St. Thomas woman scoots for HELP when she needs it

Seldom does double bunion surgery put you in a position to be envied, yet Lilly Lysengen knows that feeling. The St. Thomas, N.D., woman was using a knee scooter in a larger Grand Forks retail store this spring when a child, eyes wide, spotted her and said, “Daddy! That looks so fun!”

Perhaps the child didn’t notice that her elevated foot was in a boot cast. “I love that little thing,” Lilly said about the scooter. “Everybody teased me, too.” She didn’t mind.

Lilly borrowed the knee scooter from NDAD’s Grand Forks office through its Healthcare Equipment Loan Program. Call it free HELP — access to durable medical equipment for up to 90 days at no charge.

“We were willing to pay,” Lilly said. “It was just a real surprise that something that wonderful and available in town would be free.”

In gratitude, Lilly generously gave NDAD a donation.

Lilly had bunion surgeries in early May and early June, respectively, so she was able to retain the same scooter for both recovery periods.

“I really appreciated it,” Lilly said. “It helped me even in my own house to get to the bathroom, to the kitchen and back. The opportunity to have something like that is terrific. Much easier than crutches. It’s light. It folds down and fit in my car perfectly.”

In fact, the day after she borrowed the NDAD scooter, she visited an area garden center and “scooted around all over the place — and got all the plants I needed,” she said.

“In that instance,” she chuckled, “crutches would have been kind of awkward.”

NDAD’s HELP program is offered through its four North Dakota offices. Call (800) 532-NDAD, or visit NDAD.org for more details.

Minot man’s adjustments after stroke, seizures received key NDAD assists

The way Minot’s Adrien Miller puts it, “we do what we do.”

Adrien and her 30-year companion, Vernon Voeller, are 73. “Just the nicest person ever,” she says about Vernon, her former Sweetheart Bakery co-worker. “That’s why he has so many friends.”

Adrien also is Vernon’s full-time caregiver since a massive July 2015 stroke left his left side immobile. Diabetes and subsequent seizures further complicate his care. Vernon’s stroke sideswiped his days, but not his decades-earned reputation, as a skilled jack of all trades. “I have to get him into the chair, into bed, feed him,” Adrien said. “I have to do everything. Luckily, I’ve got my health.”

They’ve had invaluable help from others, Adrien said, including NDAD and its free-of-charge Healthcare Equipment Loan Program (HELP).

A standing lift, on temporary loan from NDAD, helps Adrien move and transfer Vernon at their residence. NDAD also assisted the couple with raising funds to be used toward purchasing their accessible van.

Until they purchased that van, Miller regularly worked with NDAD’s Minot office to borrow its accessible van for temporary use. The van helped her bring Vernon to all manner of medical appointments and to other locations when she had to run errands.

‘Go check with NDAD, because if they can’t help you, they will try to find somebody who can,” Adrien said. “We’ve been very satisfied with their help. Very, very satisfied. They’re such nice people.”
SHIRLEY: ‘NDAD’s program is the most amazing I have ever seen’

Continued from Page 2

According to Shirley, she discussed the matter with a Medicare representative, who told her to order a new chair because she needed one.

But later, Shirley received startling news that Medicare “came back and denied the new chair,” which cost thousands of dollars. Medicare rescinded approval at least in part because fewer than five years passed since she last received a new chair, she said.

To make matters more complicated, Shirley’s chair would need a different seat cushion that didn’t give her pressure sores and jeopardize her well-being. A financing solution eluded her.

Shirley tried using her manual wheelchair for several days to determine whether she could get by without a power chair. She struggled mightily with multiple obstacles and only several days later was in much physical pain.

“Shirley, you can’t do that!” warned her chiropractor, who adjusted her painful hips, back and neck.

Shirley borrowed a power wheelchair from HERO, a Fargo-based non-profit organization that recycles healthcare equipment. Still, she lacked the strength to maneuver that chair, which also did not fit her well.

Life had become “a big hassle,” she recalled. Then she learned about NDAD, and she soon regained her hopeful outlook.

And a life she lives more confidently. “I do my own personal cares and cooking and so on,” Robideau said. “I have (Community Living Services) to help me with the cleaning and shopping and things that I am not able to do alone,” which includes some food preparations.

She no longer stands on her own, or even lifts herself in a transfer, needing instead to use a sliding board to move to and from her bed.

But with her new power chair, Shirley says she’s once again a very active person.