

# R E P O R T

*Your United Way of Broome County investment at work*

*August 2003*

## HCA improves quality of life for kids with disabilities

Meghan Ackerman was faced with enormous challenges from the beginning of her young life: she was born with cerebral palsy, a disorder that causes a hindrance in body movement. In order to help her overcome the challenges of this disorder (which has no cure) and reach her maximum potential, Meghan's parents Michelle and Rob sought the aid of the **Handicapped Children's Association (HCA)**. When Meghan's parents first brought her in to HCA at age three, she could not walk or ambulate. After being screened and evaluated by staff professionals, Meghan was placed into HCA's integrated preschool program.

### Special program integrates kids with and without special needs

This special preschool program integrates both children with and without special needs. This approach helps both types of kids learn from each other in an integrated setting, an approach that comes with the belief that kids learn best from other kids. The program helps kids with physical, intellectual, and social development through the use of speech, physical, and occupational therapists. There Meghan was able to receive the support and therapy she needed in order to make her as independent as possible. Through this program, Meghan was able to greatly improve her motor skills, and now she is able to walk with the aid of a walker. She was also able to overcome her shyness through the interaction with the other children, and is now an extremely sociable and outgoing child. Her therapists at the preschool helped her make the transition from the preschool program to regular school as early as possible.

When Meghan was finally able to attend regular public school at the age of five, her need for HCA's services did not end. Though she received therapy in her

new school, the therapies were restricted to activities that directly affected her education. But Meghan's parents wanted her to learn how to participate in activities that her peers take for granted, such as learning how to ride a bike. HCA was there to help Meghan in an important rite of passage for children. The physical therapists there helped Meghan and her family choose the perfect bike, and modified it to fit her special needs. The bike is an adult tricycle with back support and modified pedals to help her remain on the bike while riding. She is now able to ride her bike along with

her family and friends. She also receives aqua therapy at HCA to improve her mobility and muscle strength.

Now nine years old, Meghan is leading a happy, successful life. She has even been selected as the Elks Club poster child for cerebral palsy, which allows her to advocate for those who face the same challenges.

### United Way funds off-set costs

Since the Ackermans' medical insurance doesn't fully cover the services they receive for Meghan at HCA, United Way's funds help make up the difference of the cost. Services for special needs children can be extremely costly, and many insurance carriers don't fully cover the cost of these services. That's why United Way's funding is integral in helping families afford the services they need to help improve the quality of their children's lives.

HCA is working every day to improve the quality of life for children with and without special needs. Meghan is just one example of the many children that pass through HCA's programs every day and come out more independent and self-reliant. In addition to its integrated preschool program, HCA operates the Diagnostic/Treatment Center, early intervention programs for children up to five years of age, the Speech and Hearing Center, the Weekend Respite Program, individualized residential alternatives, and Family Support Services.

To learn more about HCA's programs, call 798-7117. To learn how you can help HCA through United Way, call 729-2592 or visit [www.unitedwaybroome.org](http://www.unitedwaybroome.org).



**Handicapped Children's Association (HCA) has special programs and services to help kids with disabilities live better, more productive lives.**



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