

Media Release

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For Immediate Release

Driver program helps grounded pilot regain independence

London, Ontario - The driver assessment rehabilitation program (DARP) at Parkwood Hospital is helping people get back behind the wheel who have lost their drivers' license because of changes in their health from trauma, illness or natural aging.

For Mark Ideson, formerly a traffic helicopter pilot for a Toronto radio station, DARP gave him back his independence. He was taking a helicopter for a maintenance flight when it crashed into a farmer's field. He awoke from an induced coma 10 days later with 29 broken bones—including his legs, pelvis and neck—and the news he had quadriplegia.

For a man used to navigating the skies, being grounded in a wheelchair wasn't enough. "I wanted to drive again. I missed the ability to get up and go, and felt guilty relying on my wife to drive me everywhere," he says.

A year after the accident Mark was assessed at DARP to see if he was physically and cognitively able to drive. The assessment revealed his arms functioned well enough to drive a modified vehicle. "Helicopters are flown partly with hand controls, so learning to drive a vehicle with my hands came fairly easily to me," says Mark.

DARP clients also include those with physical disabilities who require equipment to enable safe and accessible driving and those who need special instruction or vehicle adaptations to learn to drive. As well, Parkwood is one of only six centres authorized to conduct driving assessments for people who do not meet the peripheral vision requirements to drive in Ontario.

Today Mark proudly chauffeurs his wife and children where they need to go in his modified truck. "It's such a wonderful feeling to get back behind the wheel again and regain that feeling of independence," Mark says.

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