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NATICK WOMAN FINDS HOPE FOUR YEARS AFTER LIFE-CHANGING DIAGNOSIS

“I Am So Grateful” - Community is Helping Kara Drive Again and More

NATICK, Mass.—On August 6, Natick resident Kara Toomey will celebrate a complicated anniversary: four years since she was diagnosed with a life-changing autoimmune illness. While the diagnosis has introduced countless new hardships and challenges, Kara is still finding a reason to believe in hope as her community helps to bring independence and mobility back within her reach through the ability to drive again.

“One day, my life was normal...the next morning, I woke up completely paralyzed,” remembers Kara. In 2017, she was diagnosed with [autonomic ganglionopathy](#) or AAG out of the blue - an extremely rare disorder with no known cause in which the body’s immune system attacks the nervous system. Just one hundred Americans are diagnosed with AAG each year. There is no cure or proven treatment for AAG.

“The immediate onset of this disease took away things I had previously taken for granted, like walking, driving, working, and hanging out with my friends and family,” explained Kara. “Literally overnight, I lost my independence, which then led me to lose my sense of confidence. It significantly impacted my self-esteem.”

Fighting through the immense challenges of the diagnosis, Kara found hope: a pathway that would allow her to learn to drive again so that she can fully return to her community, gain a sense of freedom and independence, and, depending on how her symptoms progress, potentially even return to work.

“I cannot believe how far I’ve come,” she said. “I started out working on picking up nickels off a counter – now I am able to drive with hand controls. It’s completely overwhelming.”

On June 24, she got her license. On August 3, she went to work at a trial position for the first time in four years.

Until she can afford an accessible vehicle of her own, Kara must depend on her parents to get her to and from opportunities like this trial position.

“Driving lessons cost upwards of \$600,” said Kara. “Retrofitting a car for accessibility is at least \$5,000, and purchasing a car to retrofit would be \$20,000 or more.” Kara says she is already \$18,000 in medical debt.

In 2020, Kara began partnering with the nationally-recognized medical fundraising nonprofit Help Hope Live to cover the costs associated with ongoing medical care, mobility, and accessible driving. Her fundraising page:

<https://helphopelive.org/campaign/18017/>

The nonprofit verifies Kara's medical and financial need and allows for tax-deductible donations. Help Hope Live manages all funds raised for complete donor accountability and pays qualified expenses directly.

Fundraisers have included a 5K event, a cupcake sale, Facebook Fundraisers, and an ongoing authentic New England whoopie pie sale. Shipping is available. Order your whoopie pies now to support Kara's campaign:

<https://events.helphopelive.org/event/5432/signup/>

Fundraising has already helped Kara to cover the cost of driving lessons plus pay off critical hospital bills and overdue medical bills, secondary insurance to reinforce her Medicare benefits, and co-pays associated with essential medications.

"Fundraising has been a godsend, and all I have accomplished so far could not have happened without your love and support," said Kara. "Thank you for helping this amazing dream come true. Being seen and feeling like someone really sees you feels amazing. I am so grateful."

Donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law, and all funds raised will be managed by the nonprofit to cover verified medical and related expenses.

Help Hope Live is a national nonprofit that specializes in engaging communities in secure, tax-deductible fundraising campaigns for people who need a transplant or are affected by a catastrophic injury or illness. Since 1983, campaigns organized by Help Hope Live have raised over \$150 million to pay patient expenses.

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