

CHOOSING WHEELCHAIR BASKETBALL

After exploring what options were available to her, Helaina Cyr decided wheelchair basketball would be most interesting. She started playing basketball every Saturday with the Alberta Northern Lights (ANL) in September, 2005 and has thoroughly enjoyed herself. Not only has it been fun to learn a new skill, basketball has allowed Helaina to redefine herself. At school, she is no longer Helaina with spina bifida but now Helaina the basketball player.” The fact that Helaina is a skilled basketball player has facilitated inclusion at school and in the community. Able-bodied friends and neighbors enjoy playing a game of basketball with Helaina, and many have experienced the game using one of the three wheelchairs the Cyr family has on loan from the ANL. Helaina’s mom, Vanessa, has appreciated what wheelchair basketball has done for their entire family. Helaina’s brother, Caleb, started playing with the team at the same time as Helaina, and her younger sister, Julia, is just starting this year. The kids enjoy shooting baskets together from their respective wheelchairs, and have been able to connect in a meaningful way through basketball. Vanessa has also appreciated the mentoring that occurs through the Alberta Northern Lights. The coaches for the team are incredibly supportive and enthusiastic, and the atmosphere at practices is very inclusive and supportive. Because participants in the Minilights program range in age from 6-16, there is a real opportunity for younger participants to learn from their older teammates. Helaina has been able to participate in two tournaments, in Vancouver (November, 2006), and in Saskatoon (April, 2007). The entire family was able to attend the tournament this past spring, and appreciated the opportunity to be part of the wheelchair basketball community. It felt great to be ordinary, one of many families there affected by disability. The ANL invites individuals of all abilities to play with the Minilights. Practices are every Saturday from 10 AM – 12 Noon, and are held at local elementary schools. Registration is ongoing. For more information or to register in this unique program, contact Chad with the ANL at (780) 433-4310.

