



Feature Volunteer – Suzy Stead

by Suzy Stead

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I remember the room at Sick Kids and thinking that, although it was bright with colour, it was small. It was there in that small lonely room that I made my call to AboutFace. My beautiful daughter Katie had been born Kate Sadie Joan Atkinson one week prior and along with her lovely name came a diagnosis of Treacher Collins syndrome. She had been born in a Scarborough hospital and it became quickly evident that she needed to be at Sick Kids where she was eventually trached due to significant breathing concerns. At Sick Kids, I met a wonderful social worker who connected me with two great gifts: a book by Hope Charkins called *Children with Facial Differences* and AboutFace. The timing was perfect as I had had my fill of medical input (not knowing at the time that there was plenty more of that to come) and I just needed a non-medicinal voice to tell me that there were others in similar circumstances “out there”.

From my first conversation with Anna Pileggi, now almost 15 years ago, to my continued interaction with AboutFace staff, the message is clear that their hope has always been about helping others (either children or adults with a facial difference or family members) to make their journey less arduous. AboutFace and all of the people I have met through AboutFace continually inspire me to stay involved and lend a hand whenever I can.

I honestly cannot remember when I first started to volunteer with AboutFace but I recall many of the events over the years that I have participated in such as conference workshops, Health on the Line, dental convention, curling club fundraiser, summer picnic, Leap of Faith and recently a skin conference. Since December 2009, I have facilitated the parent conference calls monthly and I am truly lucky that I am able to converse and share similar stories with many parents.

I grew up in a small family but we always had many people involved in our lives as it was instilled in us to become engaged with our community and never shy away from life’s difficult decisions and experiences. AboutFace is my community and AboutFace gave me the strength and the “emotional” tools to move forward on the journey with Katie.

Presently, Katie is an amazing 15 year old who is kind, smart, funny and empathetic. Our passion is AboutFace and as Katie likes to quote Katy Perry (singer/songwriter) “Mom, we are all original and we are all fireworks” and indeed we are.