# Cancer survivor gets new playground

**EMILY HAWS** Telegraph-Journal
July 16, 2017

Share this article Facebook Twitter Email

Shawn Dube, 3, makes good use of his new slide, a part of the wish he was granted by the Children's Wish Foundation of Canada. He was diagnosed with cancer at 6 months old, and has been in remission for two years.
Photo: Emily Haws/Telegraph-Journal

QUISPAMSIS • Shawn Dube's curly blonde hair fills with static as he goes down the curved tunnel slide of his new playground, courtesy of the Children's Wish Foundation of Canada.

Dube turned three in April, and when you first meet him you would never guess he is a cancer survivor. He is full of energy - running around the house and feeding Goldfish crackers to his parents, then putting on his Disney's Cars light-up shoes and running outside. He climbs up on the playhouse, slides down the slide once more, and then picks up handfuls of the small rocks covering the playground's surface. He throws them at the other slide, watching enthusiastically as they go down. He also drops the rocks on the ground and throws them around his backyard.

His parents, Jake and Sara Dube, are trying to teach him not to throw rocks. It is a work in progress, they say.

“It seems so simple to just let him go out and nobody has to keep him in,” said Sara Dube, noting times when they needed the medical team's permission.

The wish request was put in by a relative of the family about a year or two ago, but rules stipulate children need to be three years old to receive one. Volunteers from the Saint John Marina came to set up the playground in early July, which includes a play structure with swings, slides, and a playhouse, as well as a sand box, a teeter-totter shaped like an airplane, and a dome climbing structure.

Shawn Dube was playing with the pieces of the play set as they were constructing it, said his parents, and the work continues. A local landscaping company recently came forward to do some landscaping for the family.

“It’s exciting, knowing that he’s going to have that for years to come and how excited he was to play on it,” said Jake Dube. “We can just let him do his own thing and let him be a kid.”

“You hear about kids getting wishes and stuff, but when you watch your backyard getting transformed into a play area, you’re like ‘oh, he really is getting it,’” said Sara Dube.

Shawn Dube chose the playground because he loves being outside, said Jake Dube. On Saturday, he spent about six hours playing in it. With one now in the backyard, it is even more accessible.

“This way here he can have it for years to come - a trip, you go one time, and will he remember it? We don’t know," said Jake Dube. "This way here he can have it for as long as he wants to use it.”

Shawn Dube was six months old when he was diagnosed. Sara Dube had a normal pregnancy, she said, and even after he was born his tests came back fine. But then they started to see red flags - he developed neural spasms, and there was a small bump they could feel on his belly. One night the family was sitting down to dinner when another spasm happened and Sara Dube decided the family was going to the emergency room.

Ten days later, they were given the cancer diagnosis. Neuroblastoma is a type of childhood cancer that starts in immature nerve cells in the sympathetic nervous system, according to the Canadian Cancer Society website. Shawn Dube was diagnosed with stage three, having a tumour attached to his spine about the size of his belly - much larger than the small bump his parents had felt.

Shawn was immediately transferred to the IWK Health Centre in Halifax. Despite the obstacles, Jake and Sara Dube said their son kept smiling.

“We look back on days we knew were really bad and he’s still smiling,” Sara Dube said, looking at photos on her phone. “It’s a bit of a blessing he was so young because he doesn’t dwell on the fact that he had it.”

Doctors decided at first they did not want to do surgery because they were concerned about paralyzing him, so Dube was given chemotherapy. After they realized the chemotherapy was not working, they decided to operate in Dec. 2014. The plan was to remove as much of the tumour as possible, with the hope it would go away on its own, said Sara Dube.

“They gave us the all clear in June of 2015,” she said. “He’s two years in remission.”

Shawn Dube only needs to visit the IWK Health Centre annually and the Saint John Regional Hospital every six months for check-ups.

“The children’s hospital will follow us until he turns 18, and then there are still things he’ll have to get checked right through until his last day,” she said, noting his heart, kidneys, and hearing would be checked.

Jake and Sara Dube said it is hard sometimes to return to normal life and they struggle with being overprotective. Still, they are ecstatic about how quickly he has adapted back to being a regular kid.

“When you’re in it, you’re kind of on an adrenaline high so you kind of just have to do what you have to do,” said Sara Dube. “I don’t think it's until you get home and back into normal things that you realize how bad it really was.”

“You realize how much it could have taken away … He’s bounced back phenomenally.”

Share this article Facebook Twitter Email

**0 Comments** **Telegraph Journal** **EMILY HAWS**

♡ **Recommend** **Share** **Sort by Best**

Start the discussion…

Be the first to comment.

ALSO ON **TELEGRAPH JOURNAL**

## Telegraph-Journal

1 comment • a day ago•

**LEONARD MCLAUGHLIN** — If eating unhealthy costs the govt 4 billion a year, wouldn't it make sense to put some of the money in assisting

## Greater Saint John

1 comment • 21 hours ago•

**ANDREW HOWARTH** — These people have great talent.

## Miramichi Leader

1 comment • a day ago•

**RAY BROWN** — A "new" record. Check the meaning of record!

## Dog dies in early morning Saint John fire

2 comments • 10 hours ago•

**vicki beechin** — aww so very sad. I'd be heart broken if I lost my fury friend like this. My heart goes out to the family

**Subscribe** **Add Disqus to your siteAdd DisqusAdd** **Privacy**