

Victoria woman receives Alberta's support

Alberta is coming out in force to support a Victoria woman suffering from a rare and debilitating disease and now organizers of a fundraising initiative are hoping to see the same sort of enthusiasm from Victoria residents.

After having suffered constant and extreme pain for two years, Victoria's Fern Kwantes was diagnosed with reflex sympathetic dystrophy (RSD), a progressive disease of the autonomic nervous system. While Kwantes' doctors have been able to pinpoint the cause of her pain, they have run out of options when it comes to treating the disease. As such, Kwantes is hoping to try a different route – the experimental ketamine coma trial in Mexico, facilitated by Dr. Anthony Kirkpatrick, whose practice is in Florida.

With that goal in mind, Kwantes' identical twin sister, Faith Wood, who lives just outside of Calgary, Alta., has initiated a fundraising campaign, Faith for Fern, to raise the money needed to cover all the expenses involved. Those costs include a trip to Tampa, Fla., in early August for Kwantes to be examined by Kirkpatrick. Should Kwantes be OKed for the treatment, she will then be flying to Mexico for the treatment, during which she will be put into a five-day coma.

Faith for Fern began with a simple, yet lofty, goal: raise \$75,000 in 120 days, which translates to \$858 a day or \$35 an hour. Even though close to \$25,000 has been collected, the clock continues to tick and Wood is hoping to reach even more people, especially those in her sister's home of Victoria, before the Sept. 2 deadline.

From the beginning, individuals and businesses in the Calgary area have been strong supporters of Faith for Fern. Fundraising efforts have run the gamut from a talent show to the donation of \$571 from a local teenager, who gave the change she has been saving all her life to the cause. Now, with fewer than 50 days left, Wood is hoping to build momentum in Victoria, closer to her sister's home.

"I feel optimistic," Wood said. "What I'm really positive about is that we've raised the money that we need to send her to Tampa."

For now, the final outcome is up in the air until Kwantes has the opportunity to see Kirkpatrick. Even if she is not approved for the treatment, though, the money raised will be used to assist with her care — ongoing treatment, therapy and medications, as well as modifications to her home to improve accessibility as her health deteriorates.

"At the end of the day," Wood said, "whatever we raise is a benefit."

For more information on the Faith for Fern initiative or to donate, visit:

www.faithforfern.com

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For more information on the Faith for Fern campaign, or to set up interviews, please contact Kirsty Young at kirsty.young@tinypr.ca or 403 703 005, or Faith Wood at faith@imind.ca or 403 461 3498. To contact Fern Kwantes directly please call 250 389 6716 or fernkwantes@hotmail.com.