



OTTAWA CITIZEN

Rick Hansen pays emotional tribute to Ottawa Children's Treatment Centre

Mohammed Adam, Ottawa Citizen

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OTTAWA — The Man in Motion made an emotional return Thursday to the Ottawa Children's Treatment Centre, where 25 years ago he inspired a generation of disabled children to live out their dreams.



In a room packed with children with physical and developmental disabilities, Rick Hansen spoke about the tremendous improvements that have been made in the 25 years since he embarked on his inspirational global wheelchair tour to make the case not just for universal accessibility for disabled people, but acceptability.

He recalled that the world was a different place a quarter of a century ago, a time when disabled people were basically confined to the back of the room, but times have changed. Recalling his message of "anything is possible," Hansen told the children and their parents that each one of them is very special, with goals, aspirations and much to offer. They should live out their dreams, he said.

"Each one of us can make a difference," Hansen said.

Hansen, who is on a cross-country tour to mark the 25th anniversary of Man in Motion, said he couldn't mark the anniversary without returning to the OCTC, and he paid tribute to the centre, which he said, has helped "liberate" many people.

One such person, who has certainly lived out his dreams, is 25-year-old Corey Smith. Put in a wheelchair by encephalitis and Epstein Barr when he was 15, Smith took inspiration from

Hansen, and went on to achieve his dream of playing basketball for Canada. A former client of the Ottawa Children's Treatment Centre, Smith is a member of the national wheelchair basketball team that tours and plays around the country and the world. His big dream is to make the final team and play in the Olympics. Just as Hansen inspired him, Smith said he hopes to inspire other youth to believe that disability is no barrier to personal success.

Hansen, who married his physiotherapist and has three children, says his goal now is to help create a new generation of "difference makers" like Smith to carry the torch.

A car accident left Hansen paralyzed when he was 15. He was the first person with a disability to graduate from the University of British Columbia's physical education program. He won six medals at the 1980 and 1984 Paralympics — three gold, two silver and one bronze — in the relay and several distance events.

Inspired by Terry Fox's example, he began a journey that took him through 34 countries on four different continents to raise money and awareness for spinal cord injuries.

The Rick Hansen Relay is a commemoration of the 25th anniversary of his journey. It began Aug. 24 in Cape Spear, NL, and is expected to finish in Vancouver in May of next year and involve 7,000 participants.

with files from Claire Brownell