

Bathroom makeover makes life easier for ailing girl

By [Dave Nicholson](#)



photo credit

Shawn Santos said the bathroom makeover arranged by Wheelchairs For Kids of Tarpon Springs will make it easier to bathe her 6-year-old daughter, Brooklynn, who has spinal muscular atrophy. The Plant City girl can't walk or sit upright by herself. DAVE NICHOLSON

PLANT CITY – Six-year-old Brooklynn Santos' parents physically struggled to bathe their daughter, who has a genetic disease that progressively weakens her muscles and saps her strength.

A Tarpon Springs-based charity, Wheelchairs 4 Kids, learned of the difficulties Jayson and Shawn Santos were having and offered a helping hand: a bathroom makeover.

The work at the family's Plant City home included ripping out the bathtub and making the shower wheelchair-accessible, among other work to accommodate Brooklynn's condition.

“I’m overjoyed that the people would come together and do what they did for us, what they did for her,” Shawn Santos said.

Brooklynn, a sweet, intelligent and animated child, beamed as her mom wheeled her into the remodeled bathroom.

“Can I have a shower now?” Brooklynn said.

Brooklynn, their only child, has spinal muscular atrophy and cannot walk or sit upright without support. She was diagnosed when she was about 1 year old after her parents noticed she wasn’t reaching the milestones of babies her age.

Brooklynn receives daily physical therapy and makes regular visits to her pediatrician and other specialists.

The couple, who have been married for 13 years, have had difficulty lifting her into a shower chair and maneuvering around the tub to get her clean. Shawn said the accessible shower is a godsend as bath time was taking at least 20 minutes for the 34-pound girl.

“I’m just overjoyed. This will make it much, much easier,” she said.

Wheelchairs 4 Kids, as the name suggests, provides wheelchairs for needy children. But it also arranges for home and vehicle modifications and assistive and therapeutic devices, Executive Director Madeline Robinson said.

The Santos asked the charity for help about two months ago, and staff members arranged for Tub to Shower Conversions to donate the project.

Robin Lill, senior safety professional with Tub to Shower, said her brother, Steve Foose, who founded the nationwide company, was touched by Brooklynn’s story and enthusiastically agreed to help. He sent Lill and a two-person crew for the demolition and remodeling.

The project was sponsored by 13 Ugly Men, a nonprofit group of community leaders from throughout the region.

Wheelchairs 4 Kids could use more support and volunteers, Robinson said. For information, go to Wheelchairs4kids.org or call (727) 946-0963.

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