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Devin Cabbage, 9, listens from her wheelchair as caretaker Christine Benson reads "Silly Little Goose" after school Wednesday. Devin, who has cerebral palsy, lost her main mode of transportation when a man, eluding police, crashed into the rear of her empty wheelchair-accessible van. (Grant M. Haller / P-I)

It's not just a van, it's her way to the world

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By **ROBERT L. JAMIESON JR.**
P-I COLUMNIST

Here's the thing with criminals -- unless they physically hurt or kill someone, they rarely know the depths of the misery they sow.

On May 29, a State Patrol trooper saw a GMC Yukon pass in the opposite direction near downtown Seattle. The driver wasn't wearing a seat belt. The SUV also was missing its front license plate. So, the trooper turned around to pull over the vehicle but its driver, Charles Keeney, floored it.

Keeney made "a few quick turns" to elude the trooper, the State Patrol says. Keeney's SUV blew through a red light. He sped off before smashing into an unoccupied van on Minor Avenue East -- Devin's van.

Devin Cabbage turns 10 in two weeks. She smiles and laughs when she is happy. She frowns and cries when she is not. This is the way Devin communicates because she cannot talk. If she could, she probably would give Keeney an earful, starting with how the tan van he crashed into -- a 1993 Volkswagen Eurovan -- was her lifeline.

Born with cerebral palsy, Devin is lucky to be alive. Her twin died in the womb.

Devin has battled seizures and, more recently, orthopedic and glandular problems. She cannot walk. She cannot feed herself. A pump injects medicine into her spine to help control her muscles.

Devin likes to go to Green Lake and people-watch. She giggles when she feeds her pet fish before bedtime. Her special classes at Lowell Elementary School on Capitol Hill make her happy.

"She gets cabin fever pretty easy," her father, Dawson Cabbage, says with an easy chuckle.

"A ride in the car is a constant sense of joy for her," says Devin's stepmother, Katie Poinier, who lovingly calls Devin by the nickname "Ms. Goose."

"She loves motion."

The van, smashed up in the rear, and now unusable, was what Devin used to get to occupational and physical therapy sessions, as well as to the hospital for emergencies -- 12 trips alone last year. It was equipped with a special lift for her wheelchair.

Devin's family got the van for \$7,500 in 2001, a relative bargain. Her father poured in thousands of dollars for upkeep. The van did break down occasionally but at least it ran, which is the most important thing to a family living on a strict budget and renting a home in the Eastlake neighborhood.

Both Devin's parents work but her dad soon will return to grad school, putting them in a predicament to find an affordable replacement van that is reliable and wheelchairaccessible.

The auto insurance company for the family -- "A good company," Devin's father tells me -- says the family shouldn't expect much for the old van because of its age.

It would be nice if Keeney, the guy accused of slamming into the van, could write a check. After all, he is the one responsible for this mess.

I wanted to ask him if he is going to step up but he's not around. He's on the run.

The State Patrol says that after Keeney's SUV crashed he took off on foot, getting away despite the best efforts of troopers who swarmed the area.

Authorities questioned Keeney's female passenger, who quickly identified the man who was behind the wheel -- a 45-year-old with "an extensive criminal history and outstanding felony warrants," said State Patrol spokesman Jeff Merrill. "A bad guy."

After impounding Keeney's SUV, investigators found a stash of cocaine and drug paraphernalia, including bongs. The female passenger was arrested after drugs were found in her possession. Authorities say Keeney could face misdemeanor and felony charges for hit and run, and for the drugs. A traffic collision report says he was going "too fast."

There is hope in this story -- hope in a jar; well, no, a plastic bucket, actually. The bucket sits on a checkout counter of Pete's Supermarket, on 58 E. Lynn St., near Devin's home. Friends and strangers have donated \$500 to raise the money that Devin and her family will need for a replacement van. One stranger in the Netherlands who heard about the story donated \$25 to [Devin's Web site](#), where hundreds of dollars have poured in.

People want to give the pretty child who has had a tough life the chance to get out of the house, go to Green Lake and soak up the summer sun.

The kid deserves a van.

HOW TO HELP

To help Devin Cabbage, go to devin.freewebspace.com.

Or send donations to:

Bank of America

Attn: Devin Cabbage Medical Transportation Fund

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