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Dawson Cabbage, his wife, Katie Poinier, and daughter Devin, 9, pause for a photo in front of their new van. "She loves it," Devin's father says. "Every time it rolls up, she giggles." (Family Photo)

Family puts crime in new rearview mirror*Thursday, September 20, 2007**Last updated 8:20 a.m. PT***By ROBERT L. JAMIESON JR.**

P-I COLUMNIST

"It's a shame," said Jeff Merrill of the State Patrol, when I phoned for an update. "He's still out there. But we will get him."

In May, a GMC Yukon with a missing front plate that police say was driven by Charles Keeney slammed into an unoccupied van in Eastlake while eluding a state trooper. The collision set in motion a chain of events that had misfortune written all over it -- until the power of good prevailed this summer.

The van was a lifeline for a 9-year-old Seattle girl named Devin Cabbage, who has cerebral palsy.

Devin cannot walk or talk. Her mom and dad used the Volkswagen Eurovan, rigged for a wheelchair, to take the cherubic girl to parks, shopping and for emergency trips to the hospital -- not that any of that mattered to Keeney, who has a history of drug use and outstanding felony warrants. Authorities say Keeney was behind the wheel but fled on foot after the smash-up, leaving an ordinary family in an extraordinary pickle.

Insurance couldn't come close to covering the cost of a new van. And between the Cabbages' monthly rent in Eastlake and looming graduate-school bills for Devin's father, it looked as if a stranger's recklessness was going to leave tread marks.

But then a neighborhood store in Eastlake set up a plastic bucket at the checkout counter. Day by day, crumpled buck by buck, the bucket filled with generosity.

Fate also ushered in Kate Dussault. She happened to see a flier about Devin's plight at a Laundromat in the neighborhood, and it touched her.

Dussault has a brother who was disabled by a brain injury. She is married to Bill Dussault, a Seattle attorney who specializes in disability issues. What's more, she's planning a non-profit to assist disabled people by linking them with vans they can obtain on a sliding fee scale.

Even though the non-profit is still on paper, she decided to do whatever she could to attract donors for Devin and find a dependable, affordable van.

Finally, in June, Devin got ink in this column. What happened next ought to soften the most bedrock cynic.

Contributions poured in from Seattle and beyond, reaching about \$30,000 and leading to some summer magic: Devin got wheels.

Her new ride is a 2005 Dodge, and it's got some miles. But it runs well and looks sporty, as far as vans go.

The Cabbages -- with a key hand from Dussault -- used the donations to buy the vehicle at a price below markup, otherwise the van would have cost several thousands more.

"She loves it," Devin's father said Wednesday. "Every time it rolls up, she giggles."

On Sunday, the van came in handy when Devin was suffering from what looked like pink eye. Her stepmom, Katie Poinier, rushed her to urgent care.

Says the girl's dad, Dawson Cabbage: "Without the van ..."

What I'm going to write next might make the Cabbages blush.

After they got the new vehicle, their work was far from done.

They purchased nice stationery and sent thank you notes to people who had sent money.

"Devin has a new van," said a note shared by a friend who got one in the mail. "Thank you so much for your help in getting it."

Classy.

Devin's father says he was moved when he heard Dussault wanted to tap Devin's recent experience to energize the push to get affordable vehicles for families with disabled loved ones.

"I wish Devin could realize that she's inspired others."

And on that upbeat note ends this story about a bad guy whose crash led to a world of good.

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