

Vent Love Inc.'s event benefits kids with respiratory difficulties

BY VANESSA BALDOMERO

Stephonne Gassant is your average 16-year-old Haitian-American boy. He enjoys football, listening to music, particularly rap, and playing video games.

But unlike most children his age, Stephonne suffers from cerebral palsy, a condition that restricts him to a wheelchair. Stephonne must use a ventilator to breath nightly and undergoes daily aerosol treatments that are used to keep airways clear. Despite all this, Stephonne is one of the most upbeat, friendly individuals one can encounter.

More than 200 members of the community gathered on Sunday, June 10, at Super Wheels, 12265 SW 112 St. in West Kendall, to raise funds for chil-

dren like Stephonne. The event ran from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and raised more than \$900 for children with respiratory difficulties.

"I had a great time on the skating rink, jamming to the music. But my favorite part was seeing all the campers again," Stephonne said.

"I started volunteering for ventilator assisted kids 10 years ago and have always wanted to be able to do more for them," said Carmen M. Prieto, president of Vent Love Inc. "These kids deserve the world. They already have to fight to breathe; the rest should be made simpler. Vent Love Inc. is here to make that happen, while also raising awareness and funds through community events like this."



Pictured at Super Wheels on June 10 are (l-r) Vent Love Inc. treasurer Jessica Rivero, secretary Yvonne Ganivet, president Carmen Prieto and vice president Tatiana Vidales.



Super Wheels offered reduced admission to event attendees, allowing participants to skate, enjoy snacks and drinks, and meet the team of doctors, nurses and volunteers that dedicate their time to the children in the community with respiratory difficulties.

Proceeds collected by Vent Love Inc. support activities such as VACC Camp, an annual weeklong free event for technologically dependent individuals to socialize with peers and enjoy activities not readily accessible to them. Most of these individuals are children who receive ventilated assistance (children needing a tracheotomy ventilator, C-PAP, BiPAP or oxygen to support breathing).

Vent Love Inc. is dedicated to raising funds for individuals with respiratory difficulties in order to better enhance their quality of life. In addition, the organization aims to continue

funding the efforts of organizations with the same function.

"Year after year the members of Vent Love Inc. have been avid supporters of Miami Children's Hospital's VACC Camp," said Dr. Moises Simpser, Miami Children's Hospital director of pulmonology.

"Not only do they coordinate fundraising efforts; they also attend activities where they interact with the kids themselves. They see first hand how much the children appreciate their kindness," he added.

"It's great when you can volunteer for a good cause and share a great experience with children who may never have the chance to enjoy certain activities," Prieto said. "I hope that through events like this we can communicate some of that so the public can have a better appreciation of what it's like to live with a disability."

For more information on Vent Love Inc., contact Tatiana Valdes at 305-726-6334 or by email at <VentLove@bell-south.net>. To make a donation or to view event photos, visit online at <www.ventlove.org>.

Vent Love Inc. president Carmen Prieto helps Jaqueline Achille on the skating rink, along with Dr. Moises Simpser and Stephonne Gassant.

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