

## Specialist Customizes Each Wheelchair with TLC

“I had some tough moments when I first began customizing wheelchairs for children, but then I realized what a difference my work was making in their lives. The right wheelchair and seating system can stop or slow down the progression of a spinal deformity,” says Kipp Anderson, supervisor of maintenance and mobility at THC of Nevada, in Las Vegas.

Anderson is the only certified professional in Southern Nevada specializing in customized wheelchairs for children and adults with biomechanical or progressive disorders. He recently received certification as an assistive technology supplier (ATS) from the Rehabilitation Engineering & Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA), an interdisciplinary association of healthcare professionals dedicated to improving the lives of individuals with physical disabilities through technology.

While this accreditation is not yet mandated in Nevada, Anderson is one of two RESNA certified ASTs in the state.



### A Custom Fit Is “Everything”

Anderson has fitted children as young as 18 months with wheelchairs. He estimates that he has customized more than 100 wheelchairs for children during his career. Most of the children he helps have either cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy.

The proper seating and positioning of a patient within a wheelchair means everything, Anderson says. He points out that patients who require wheelchair assistance often do not have upper extremity strength and control. Having the right wheelchair that provides this much-needed

support may help slow down spinal deformity and avoid possible complications.

“Adjustable seating is especially important for children or adults with progressive disorders because their needs change,” he says. “For example, if a patient has multiple sclerosis, we would consider a wheelchair with an adjustable seating base that can accommodate the patient’s changing needs.”

Anderson is often called in to consult with children who have been “making do” with a donated wheelchair. If the chair cannot be customized to fit the child’s needs, he will work with a physical therapist to select a more appropriate wheelchair and to secure funding for it, if needed. “Getting a donated wheelchair is like getting a pair of donated shoes— they just are not exactly right for you,” Anderson says. “The look on children’s faces when they sit down in the right seating system is very gratifying. These children spend most of the day in their wheelchairs, and I want to make sure they are going to be comfortable.”

### Selecting the Right Chair

With several types of wheelchairs from which to choose, Anderson says there are many factors to consider when evaluating potential models for a patient. Anderson begins the selection process by assessing each patient’s needs and abilities. To do this, he works with a clinical team of healthcare professionals that may include a physician, nurse, physical therapist or occupational therapist.

Anderson may also visit the patient’s home to see if other considerations are needed.

“A motorized wheelchair will not work if the patient has a four-inch curb blocking the front door. I check to make sure the patient can operate the chair in and out of the home safely, and I measure doorways to make sure the chair will fit through. I also consider the type of vehicle the patient or support person drives, and how the chair will be transported.”

Last, but certainly not least, is appearance. Anderson encourages children to select colors and fabrics in order to create a special, personalized look. He also arranges for the child’s name to be embroidered on the back of the chair.

“One boy told me he liked Superman, so he chose ‘Supermanblue’ for his chair,” Anderson says. “I recently completed a wheelchair for an older boy in ‘toxic green.’ His parents weren’t too sure about it, but he was very happy when he got it.”

Anderson has been working with THC of Nevada since 1999, and has 13 years of experience in selecting, customizing and repairing rehabilitation equipment for adults and children.

THC of Nevada is a full-service home healthcare company, providing a wide range of home medical equipment and rehabilitation products. For more information about THC of Nevada, please call **(800) 588-5766**.