

A happy, healthy homecoming for cancer patient

By Kim Grizzard

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After being away from home for more than 100 days, Kally Nelson hardly recognized the place.

The last time she had walked through the door, her room was light green, and there was carpet on the floor. Now the room is a vibrant shade of purple. There are different floors, even different doors.

They were all replaced while Kally was in Durham, recovering from a bone marrow transplant. The home renovation project, courtesy of **Beau's Buddies**, was designed to open the door for Kally to return to the home, the family and the life she loved.

"It's nice to have her here," Jenny Nelson, Kally's stepmother, said. "She can go anywhere in the house, and she doesn't worry about anything. It's just so nice to not worry."

Though spacious and comfortable, the Nelson home was cause for concern for Kally, a 23-year-old cancer survivor. To provide the conditions Kally's immune system required, the house needed to have windows replaced, carpet removed, and have the heating and air-conditioning system sanitized.

It sounded like a job for television's "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition," a reality series that specializes in building families new homes in about a week. But the process of applying to be part of the ABC show can take months. The Nelsons didn't have that much time before Kally was due home at the end of May.

Longtime friends Don and Kathy Carson and neighbors Charlie and Linda Wall were working to involve friends and community members in preparing Kally's room for her homecoming when they decided to approach **Beau's Buddies** Cancer Fund. The Nelsons had supported **Beau's Buddies** since its inception. Kally's mother, Jane, and brother, Daniel, both died from cancer. Since 2008, **Beau's Buddies** has provided everything from chemotherapy chairs and DVD players at Pitt County Memorial Hospital to gas cards to help families pay for travel to treatment. The organization had never taken on a renovation project, but board member Parham Stanley could hardly think of anything more appropriate to the mission the organization was built on - to help cancer patients and their families.

Stanley remembers he and his wife, Jennifer, having to be away from home when their son, Beau, the charity's namesake, was being treated for cancer.

"During the cancer battle, your whole world is just turned upside down," Stanley said. "Being away from home, I think, is one of the probably worst things."

Roger and Jenny Nelson took turns going to Durham to stay with Kally while the other remained in Bethel with son, Wesley, 12. They moved next door with the Wall family while renovations were being completed.

Friends from church, community volunteers and workers from as many as a dozen companies spent three months tearing out carpet, painting, installing windows and replacing doors on the nearly 50-year-old house. A lot of materials were donated; others were provided at cost.

"A lot of people stepped up to the plate, which allowed us to go further than we initially had planned," Stanley said. "There were a lot of people that came together that made the puzzle work."

Each time Jenny made the drive home, she would take a peek inside the house to see what piece had been added. When it all came together, it was even more than she had envisioned.

"I don't think we'll ever be able to say thank you enough to everybody," Jenny said. "When I write those cards out, I feel like it's not enough. I feel like I need to hug each and every person."

"It's beautiful," she said. "It's more than just somebody just coming in and fixing your house."

You just feel a lot of love. ... They did a lot of special things."

Volunteers asked each family member for input on colors and design.

They gave Kally a custom-built entertainment center and a television that was twice as large as her old one. They put new tile in her bathroom; they painted a verse from Scripture on her bedroom wall.

It is her favorite room in the house.

"It's like my own little place to get away and relax," Kally said. "It's really nice."

So nice, Jenny said, that Kally doesn't want to leave it.

"I have a hard time getting her downstairs from her room," she said, "because she loves it."

Kally is enjoying it while she can. In a few weeks, she is due in Chapel Hill for a second bone marrow transplant. The procedure will keep her away from home for another 100 days.

Beau's Buddies volunteers hope that thoughts of home will encourage Kally while she is away and motivate her to keep fighting until she is completely healed.

"We want it to be something that she's looking forward to coming home to," Stanley said. "And when she gets here, we want her to love it."

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