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# Toronto man has raised \$600,000 on streetcorner

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His name is Muki Baum, he has cerebral palsy, he's deaf and can barely speak. Yet for almost 20 years he's been fundraising outside Holt Renfrew for people with disabilities. His tally to date is a staggering \$600,000.

VINCE TALOTTA/TORONTO STAR

Carola Vyhnek  
Urban Affairs Reporter

If he had a million dollars, he'd buy a building for children with disabilities.

Does he think he can raise that much money, Muki Baum's mother asks him, mouthing the words slowly and clearly.

"Yes!" he says, huge smile lighting his face.

Michael "Muki" Baum has, after all, generated more than \$600,000 for people with complex disabilities. Regular pedestrians on Bloor St. W. will be familiar with the man on the red scooter outside Holt Renfrew, or inside on the concourse level when the weather's bad.

Now 51, Muki has been a permanent fixture for 20 years as he collects change from passersby. He counts \$100 in his paint can on a good day, \$650 on his best — "Thanksgiving Day 2008," he recalls instantly.

A sign on his scooter reads: "I was born with cerebral palsy and deafness but I want you to know that I am a person not a disability."

It is a message he's grown up with, instilled by parents who ignored doctors' warnings to put him in an institution because he'd be nothing more than a burdensome "piece of meat." Instead, they helped him realize his full potential.

An energetic and involved Muki "found his destiny in fundraising," says his mother Dr. Nehama Baum.

Thirty years ago, she founded MukiBaum Treatment Centres, a non-profit charitable organization for those with developmental and emotional disabilities. Their facility on Samor Rd. near Dufferin and Lawrence Aves. was built, in part, with money Muki raised.

Muki, whose [whole story is online](#), splits his efforts over three venues, including Lawrence and Sheppard plazas. He also supports Wheels in Motion and the March of Dimes.

Last year, the province awarded him a good citizenship medal for his achievements, a recognition that made him "happy and proud," says Muki, who communicates using lip reading, sign language and a type-and-talk keyboard.

He is an "unbelievable man who makes a big difference in this world," said Ruth Conlin, who retired from her job in Holt Renfrew's cosmetics department last summer.

"I have so much admiration for Muki. The word 'no' isn't in his vocabulary. He always finds a way of doing something," she said.

Nehama and Moshe Baum exposed their son to everything life had to offer, even carrying him to mountaintops to see the view on family trips. His mother, a psychologist and specialist in therapy for families with a child with cerebral palsy, had the know-how to help him learn and develop.

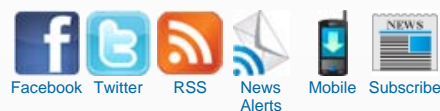
Still, Muki's journey has been fraught with challenges and even discrimination when he was once thrown out of a restaurant because he was handicapped. Ten years ago, he lost some of his independence when a near-fatal spinal cord injury forced a move back to his parents' home.

An accomplished sculptor, he has his own apartment there, along with a caregiver and an entire community that keeps an eye on him, according to Baum. When a man robbed him of \$200 and fundraising chocolate bars some years ago, everyone in a local restaurant

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passed the hat to replace the stolen cash.

What makes him happiest is knowing that his work helps other children and adults with disabilities reach their full potential, says Baum.

How much money can you raise, she asks him. "One million? Two million?"

Muki nods and smiles that big smile.

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