

Rough sledding

Hill's safety questioned after girl breaks leg

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Antoinette Manocchio is glad to see this year's snow melting.

Now she won't have to watch children toboggan down the hill near her house. It's the hill where her 6-year-old daughter, Sabrina, broke her leg last month, landing in a hospital for three weeks.

When Manocchio and her husband, Robert Arasimowicz, took their daughters Sabrina and Jessica, 8, tobogganing on Feb. 28, they thought they had done everything right. They made sure the girls wore bicycle helmets. They checked to make sure the hill at Cabrini Park, on Beaubien St. east of Lacordaire Blvd., wasn't too icy, and they supervised.

"We thought it was safe, and then my daughter ends up in the hospital for three weeks," Manocchio said.

The two sisters were riding one toboggan when it swerved and hit a fence that protects people heading up the hill. Sabrina was jolted into a pole.

The collision fractured her left femur just below the hip. For two weeks she was in traction, unable to move. After that, her leg was kept raised and in a cast, and she was not able to sit up. On Friday, a three-part cast was placed around her waist, left leg and half of her right leg.

A doctor told the girl she'll be in the cast for several more weeks and then have to undergo physiotherapy. To pass time at the Montreal Children's Hospital, Sabrina put a cast like hers on one of her dolls.

Cards, drawings and get-well wishes from her schoolmates hang all over her room. Sabrina is "too nice to be sick," one card reads.

Debbie Friedman, head of the neurotrauma program at the hospital, said the precautions Sabrina's parents took spared the little girl a much

more severe injury.

"There were significant dents on the helmet," Friedman said, adding that she recommends children wear hockey helmets.

"She was lucky because if that was her head, I would have seen her in the intensive-care unit. What happened to her femur would have certainly happened to her head."

Friedman has cautioned the city of Montreal about its playgrounds. She has recommended municipalities have wide-open areas in places designated for tobogganing.

In the last four years, the hospital has treated more than 350 toboggan-related injuries. Thirty-nine of those were head injuries, of which 16 were severe enough to warrant admission.

Friedman said the city should find something more pliable than metal poles for Cabrini Park.

The people responsible for the city's parks consider Cabrini Park safe. Municipal spokesman Edith Parizeau said there have been no accidents reported on the toboggan hill this year.

Manocchio said she and her husband carefully moved Sabrina from the hill to their home and then to the hospital when they realized how badly she was injured.

They called police days later to file an accident report, and were told it was pointless because the report hadn't been done at the scene of the accident.

"The fence is there to protect people going up the hill. Imagine the number of accidents if we took it away," Parizeau said.

The city has no plans to renovate the area, said Parizeau, adding that it is difficult for the city to use safety netting similar to that used at downhill-skiing events because of vandalism in Cabrini and other parks.

Equipment replacement in the park cost more than \$80,000 last year.

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