

FIRST PRIZE – BURLINGTON COUNTY

Emily's Early Intervention Story

Since July of 2017, Emily has received physical therapy and then speech services. When we first met Maureen Dinn, Emily's physical therapist, we were immediately impressed. At six months old, Emily still wasn't sitting up and during Maureen's first visit, she showed us several different techniques to nudge Emily in that direction. We learned to pull Emily around the house in a diaper box with a blanket on the bottom. We started putting our couch cushions on the floor to help prop her up. Before the end of July, Emily was sitting up unassisted. As time went on, we learned how to help Emily move from supine into sitting position, one limb and one movement at a time. Emily developed strength and we enjoyed learning more about how the body moved and worked to master each skill. Maureen has been an incredible resource for us!

As Emily approached her first birthday, she still wasn't eating solid food. Despite numerous visits to two different feeding clinics and conversations with Emily's gastroenterologists, we weren't making any progress. When I expressed this to Maureen, she suggested a speech evaluation. Emily then qualified for speech visits from Cheryl DeMarco. At Cheryl's first visit, she taught us how to use a toothbrush and sing to stimulate Emily's tongue. We had been trying to give Emily purees to eat and Cheryl immediately told us that "she's beyond that now." Emily needed finger foods that she could feed herself. After Cheryl's second visit, she told us that Emily had all of the skills that she needed in order to eat. Cheryl was convinced that there was something in Emily's anatomy that was preventing her from swallowing.

Upon receipt of a letter from Cheryl, Emily's doctors immediately ordered a swallow study, an upper GI, and then an MRI. It was determined that Emily's vascular ring was compressing her esophagus, making swallowing difficult. In March of 2018, Emily had surgery to dismantle her vascular ring. Without Cheryl's astute observation and letter, we have no idea how long Emily would have continued to endure this discomfort.

We are incredibly grateful to Maureen and Cheryl. Emily has thrived under their guidance. Today she walks, dances, and moves all over the place! She still struggles to eat solids but we know that with time and further support from Cheryl, she will learn that she can eat without the difficulty that she has experienced in the past.

We have been beyond impressed with the Early Intervention practitioners. Our service coordinator, Joan Lawton, has been understanding and always easily available to us. Each person has been professional and extremely knowledgeable. There has been incredible value to having these professionals come into our home, see Emily in her home environment, and get to know her where she is most comfortable. Thank you, Early Intervention, for helping our Emily and our family.