

SECOND PRIZE – GLOUCESTER COUNTY

"Tell Us Your Story" Contest Entry

A family of three eager to be four, Lilia was the apple of her family's eye from her creation. Very early into expecting her, I had the blood test that informed us she would have Down Syndrome. We were honestly scared, having no experience with disability. The worry that we wouldn't be able to give Lilia everything she needed to live her best life was heavy. We dreamed big of her, and dreamed big for her, and wanted her to be able to do what she dreamed with her life. Blessed with her amazing health, we have been able to focus on growing her mind to help her achieve her goals.

I reached out to Early Intervention while we were still waiting for our miracle to be born. At one month old, Lilia had her first services evaluation. Ironically, our initial meeting was on World Down Syndrome Day. That meeting certainly opened up our world to all of our daughter's potential. We had a focus, we had a game plan, and we felt more confident in our ability to give her the best future of possibilities. Lilia has flourished. We have watched our daughter excel under the guidance of her therapists, who also help us excel by giving us strategies and even homework.

When our oldest was little, we were much more hands off as parents. She found her own way of doing most things with an ease she still has. We had to learn a new parenting style with the focus that Lilia needed, and to guide her play in a ways that best practiced her skills. Early Intervention has given us those tools, and the sounding board to ask the questions and fine tune the techniques. Her sister has also been welcomed in, becoming a constant source of support in Lilia's education.

At every session, Lilia amazes us with some new talent she saved to impress her therapist. Her therapist will often suggest something new to work on, only to see Lilia showing the skill off with her huge smile. After a year of resisting crawling, which she still refuses to this day, the moment she walked across the room to show her physical therapist her new steps was one I will never forget. The work, the resistance, the tears, it all paid off in how proud she was of herself. It is almost like a skill doesn't become real until she can share it with her EI.

We refuse to let Down Syndrome be a limit in Lilia's life, she is going to soar high and keep going onward and upward. Her work with her therapists is creating the building blocks that will let her challenge herself, and reach for what she wants from life. We as her family have been able to grow and learn, giving her the support system she needs and deserves. Lilia's achievements have been a strong group effort, and through those efforts - she will live an amazing life!

- Karen