

The Nguyen Family Experience With EI/ECSE

Hello my name is Megan Nguyen my husband Alex could not be here today, but I did bring my mother-in-law Kimmy Nguyen and my children Bennett and Violet with me today. Bennett was born with Down Syndrome on June 7, 2010 a month before his due date and he had many complications when entering the world. He spent close to his first month of life in the NICU trying to grow and get strong, while also recovering from major abdominal surgery. The first 3 months of his life are kind of a blur because our main focus was getting our 5 pound newborn to the magical 10 pound mark so that he could have his open heart surgery. In all those hours and days we were at the hospital can you take a guess for me how much information we were taught/given about Down Syndrome? The answer is ZERO. With all the interaction with doctors, nurses, specialists, not a single person told us anything about Down Syndrome. What generally takes place at a specialist apt is he is evaluated or tested and told where he falls compared to a typical child. We are told that they would like him to be doing a, b, or C, but have never been advised on how to help him achieve said goals.

Lucky for us that changed. When Bennett turned 3 months old and just a week or so before we went in for open heart surgery we met Elsa Young. Elsa was Bennett's early intervention teacher from the time he was 3 months old until he turned 3 and started the preschool program. Elsa was the first person to actually TEACH us about our son. She was also the first person to acknowledge that we were doing a great job as parents and that Bennett seemed to be doing very well, and not just for a child with Down Syndrome. One of the first questions she asked us was if Bennett slept a lot. She explained that a lot of babies with Down Syndrome sleep well (which parents like), and when a child is sleeping they are not learning (how profound right!). Elsa taught us everything from how to keep him stimulated cognitively, to how to motivate him to move and get strong so that he could start exploring his world (because again this is how kids learn). She would bring specialists to our house when needed, who shared the same approach as Elsa of not talking "AT" us and working with us. During Bennett's first few years of life we saw a lot of doctors and specialists for many many appointments, but Elsa was the person we looked forward to seeing. She was always POSITIVE and helped us think of ways to keep Bennett progressing with his physical and cognitive development.

We were so sad to say goodbye to Elsa when Bennett turned 3 and started the preschool program, but we have been equally impressed with preschool. Bennett has gotten to be a part of Rebecca McClure's class for 2 years in a row, which was great for continuity. We are so amazed at the things Bennett can do because of school. He walks into the classroom, usually gets out his snack, and participates in class with the other students. With lots of support he has proven that he is able to do everything that "typical" children do. None of this would have been possible if Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education were not made available to Bennett. We cannot say enough good things about what it means to us. We have been so impressed that we enrolled our daughter Violet in the "typical peer" program that Hillsboro Education offers. Please consider increasing funding to these programs. Children like Bennett deserve access to a high quality education just like any other child. When I was growing up I had a lot of school pride. I entered college with 19 credits because my High School had so many AP classes offered. Oregon has excellent ratings for "typical children". I am tired of hearing people say "move to Washington they have more funding for their Special ED programs." I don't want to move. I am an Oregonian, so come on Oregon lets increase funds for Bennett and other people with potential like him. Thank you so very much for your time.

