

In 2014, Joseph David, affectionately known as JD, made his entrance into the world. I knew I was having another little boy, and just like I had done in the past, I prepared to bring a new baby into my life. However, the JD who arrived is not the JD I was expecting. After he was born we were given a surprise – JD had Down syndrome. Having a baby with Down syndrome is not something I ever considered, ever thought of, and it was certainly not in the plan for my husband and I to be parents of a child with special needs. He clearly was not the child that we had planned for. My husband showed no emotion, said nothing about the news, and only sat next to me for hours Googling. I was on a different page. After a few days to allow for the shock to wear off and the reality to set in, I just wanted to know “what now?”

While JD spent two weeks in the NICU before he could join our family at home, I spent long days beside him in the hospital while my husband maintained the home front. One night after returning from the hospital I noticed a large manila envelope had arrived in the mail. Inside was a book full of pictures of babies and children that looked like my son. The package also contained numerous resources, the cutest little onesie, and a welcome letter. The next day I received a call from the NCDSA Family Support Specialist. She asked if I had gotten the package she sent. More importantly, she asked how I was feeling, how JD was doing, and if there was anything my family or I needed. I couldn't help but blurt out all the issues JD was dealing with. For the first time in a couple of weeks, I didn't have to explain everything. She knew exactly what I was talking about and exactly how I was feeling. She was from the the North Carolina Down syndrome Alliance (NCDSA), and a mom of a son with Down Syndrome. Instantly, I knew I was not alone.

In the coming months and years, NCDSA



Your gift will help welcome new babies and provide vital resources and connections.

provided an immediate place for me to connect with families like my own, find resources for everything I was worried about, learn how to support my family's needs, as well as how to prepare for JD's future. Prior to March 2020 and the pandemic, NCDSA hosted social events for my family and others to build connections, offered programs to support JD's growth and development, as well as train parent mentors to ensure no family gets left behind on their journey just as they did for my family and me. Like so many other organizations, COVID-19 has made NCDSA adjust how they do things. NCDSA staff can no longer visit new families in the hospital or provide in-home visits. Even playdates at the park had to be suspended. Zoom has become the way to reach people but even that has its limitations. Families need in-person support and need to share their children and their emotions without hiding their smiles.

NCDSA needs your help more now than ever before. It is vital NCDSA continues to create a family of belonging and support for the Down syndrome community. Your donation will allow those in-person social events to happen

again, provide developmental programs, access to numerous resources, and continue to build those strong, supportive connections. Without your financial support, none of that is possible. Since JD's arrival, if I were to remove all the blessings that my family received simply because of the NCDSA, our lives would be very empty. My “family” has grown with all the people I've met through the NCDSA. I have gained so much knowledge I can share with the new families of babies born with Down syndrome since becoming JD's mom. NCDSA is an organization that always needs to be here. Your contribution will ensure that it does. Please join me again this year in making a tax deductible donation and receive an instant tax credit up to \$600 thanks to the CARES Act. Whether you are a family member to someone with Down syndrome or simply a friend of the community, please know that every donation counts. You can make the difference for someone just like NCDSA did for me.

Jennifer Hildreth
Community Group Coordinator

We change lives ... You make it happen

We cannot keep our doors open without your help. Support NCDSA in our mission to empower, connect and support the lifespan of individuals with Down syndrome, their families, and the community throughout North Carolina. Every gift helps make a positive impact in the life of someone with Down syndrome.



You can make any size donation by using the enclosed envelope, or online donations may be made at ncdsalliance.org/donate



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