

We had just celebrated our sweet daughter Emily's first birthday. We had noticed some developmental delays around this time and sought out an evaluation with Early Intervention. Somewhat to our surprise, Emily had qualified for physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy. Emily had significant delays in speech, gross motor and fine motor skills. This began our journey with Emily. We visited countless doctors and specialists, began physical, occupational and speech therapies, and continued to search for answers on what could be the root cause of Emily's challenges.

Fast forward two and a half years to October 14, 2022—a day we will never forget. That is the day that we received our then 3-year-old daughter Emily's official diagnosis of Phelan-McDermid Syndrome. Phelan-McDermid Syndrome is a rare genetic condition, with only approximately 3,200+ individuals ever diagnosed worldwide.

Emily, now 4-years-old, looks like a normal girl her age. She likes to play, go to preschool, eat ice cream and spend time with her family, just like any other kid. The difference is how Emily interacts with the world. Emily is nonverbal, has low muscle tone and has significant fine motor delays. Emily also has an intellectual disability caused by Phelan-McDermid Syndrome. Emily will be profoundly disabled for her entire life.

Between speech and occupational therapy, Emily attends seven therapy sessions each week. These therapy sessions can be difficult for Emily since she is asked to try and perform tasks that are challenging for her. However, Emily loves going to Horse and Buddy. As soon as we tell Emily it is time for Horse and Buddy she will race over to her helmet and start getting ready to go. Through her therapy at Horse and Buddy, Emily has gained increased core strength, dexterity and coordination. The physical benefits are apparent, but just as important, Horse and Buddy gets Emily excited and her sessions bring her so much joy. We are truly fortunate to have found Horse and Buddy for Emily.

One of the things that we love most about Horse and Buddy is that it is a program that can age with Emily. Emily can continue with Horse and Buddy as long as she wants, which is quite extraordinary. When Emily becomes an adult, she will "age out" of the school system. Emily will not receive the same services and experiences that she does now simply because of her age. However, the amazing experience she has at Horse and Buddy will continue. Emily will still realize those physical benefits when she is an adult, and she will still get to experience that same joy and excitement.

We also owe a lot of Emily's success and happiness from Horse and Buddy to the dedicated staff and volunteers. Everyone that works with Emily is so patient and kind, which are important traits when working with individuals with disabilities like Emily. We are incredibly lucky to have these amazing people in Emily's life.

It is for these reasons that we ask you to please consider supporting Horse and Buddy. Your generosity will go a long way to ensuring that people like our sweet Emily will continue to have the opportunity to do something they love, in a world in which opportunities like this are few and far between. Thank you for your consideration.

With love and gratitude,
The Cento Family
Mike, Jen, Emily and Ella

