

# Child's First Success Story

The Arc of Shelby County received this letter from a family who participates in The Arc of Shelby County's early intervention program. This program provides a coordinated, family-focused system of supports and services for children birth to three with developmental delays. The child must be delayed by 25 percent or more in their cognitive, physical, communicative, social, emotional or adaptive development, or if they have a diagnosis of a physical and/or medical condition that will likely result in developmental delay to qualify for services. At no other time in a person's life are more developmental strides made than prior to turning three years old. Children are born ready to learn, naturally curious and naturally motivated to make sense of their environments. A child's relationships and experiences during the first three years of life critically influence how the child's brain will grow.

Dear....

I am overwhelmed with praise and thanks for The Arc of Shelby County as I write this letter. We were first introduced to The Arc of Shelby County after our daughter Alayna was diagnosed with Down syndrome. With such a healthy pregnancy, we were shocked by the diagnosis. My husband and I both grieved over the thought of what the future would hold for her, and I remember instantly feeling like all my dreams for my little girl were crushed when we found out she had Down syndrome. Alayna spent her first 7 days in the NICU and although I would never wish the NICU upon any newborn, I look back on that time and am thankful that God knew what we needed. In those 7 days, we bonded with her, we cherished her, we learned from her. We learned just how blessed we were to have carried Alayna to full term, to give birth to her without any complications, to be breathing on her own, and for her to have a healthy heart. And most importantly, we learned how to be excited about the small things.

Shortly after her diagnosis, I went into research mode trying to understand more about Alayna's needs and be able to provide her every opportunity possible to succeed in life. As overwhelming as everything was, connecting with The Arc of Shelby County was truly a blessing. When Alayna was just 1 month old we met Sandee, our occupational therapist, and Jeannine, our case manager, and they really helped us put things into perspective. We discussed what goals we had for Alayna and how The Arc of Shelby County was going to help us with those. I remember how refreshing that day felt. I remember telling my husband that I felt like everything was falling into place and how excited I was to have a plan; to feel like we were doing something to help Alayna. That day was a turning point for our family. That day gave us hope.

Our little "Layna Bug" is 10 months old now and she fits right into our family of 6. She is the sunshine in each of our days and we appreciate who she is and all that she teaches our family. Most of the time, we feel like we don't know what we are doing, and we always question whether we are doing enough for Alayna. But in those moments, with the help of Sandee and Jeannine, we realize all that we are doing for her. We cherish her, we spend time with her, we have fun with her, and we definitely love on her! Alayna has such a beautiful spirit. And her smile, it makes others smile. I love how she says so much without saying a word. We want the world for Alayna, just like we do for the rest of our children.

There is a quote I hold close to my heart, "God doesn't give us what we can handle, he helps us handle what we are given." For all of these things, we are truly thankful. From our initial meeting, to all the therapy visits in between, The Arc of Shelby has helped our family embrace the future and know that there are endless possibilities! They say it takes a village to raise a child, and we are so glad The Arc of Shelby is a part of ours.....

God Bless,

Brandon, Sheila, ZaKiria, Brandon (Bigg), Kenyon, and Alayna Holifield

