

PEDIATRIC MOBILITY AT THE ARENA CLUB



Gabriel is an amazing eleven year old boy that may not be able to communicate with words, but he speaks...and speaks volumes. Just one glance at Gabriel swimming during his Pediatric Mobility sessions at The Arena Club is enough to be captured by his spirit. One can't help but wonder if there is some magic happening when he enters the water.

Gabriel was diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD), a form of muscular dystrophy that affects about 1 in 3,500 male births worldwide. This heartbreaking condition affects mainly boys and is caused by a faulty dystrophin gene. As a result, the body does not produce dystrophin – a protein that helps protect muscles. Without it, muscle fibers begin to break down and are replaced by fibrous and fatty tissue, causing the muscle to weaken. Eventually the weakness spreads to the arms, neck, and other areas. Later symptoms may include abnormal bone development and a curvature of the spine. There is no cure for Duchenne, and because of the rapid progression of the disease, the life expectancy of children with it is shortened.

Wendy, Gabriel's mother, noticed that Gabe's development was behind when he was about 9 months old. Having two older sons, she was familiar with the regular developmental marks that children typically reach. After two years of more developmental delays, Gabriel was finally diagnosed with Duchenne just short of his third birthday. Since then, the progression of the disease has also led to Gabriel suffering a broken femur three years ago and surgery in January 2012 to release tight tendons in his legs.

A very crucial part of Gabriel's treatment includes regular aquatic physical therapy. What physical movements pose a challenge to Gabriel on land, become second nature to Gabriel in the water. "Bodies need to move... to stand...to stretch," shared Wendy. "Gabriel needs that just as much as anyone else." In the water, Gabriel is able to move freely. The buoyancy of the water lightens Gabriel's weight, making it easier for him to move. Watching Gabriel transition from land to the pool is amazing. "He comes alive in the pool," Wendy expressed.

After years of land-based therapy, Wendy knew her son needed something more. A chance meeting led Wendy to Pediatric Mobility. "I was at Gabriel's school and saw someone put a business card up for Pediatric Mobility and aquatic therapy," said Wendy. "It became the perfect thing for Gabriel." And now thanks to Wendy, it has become the perfect thing for The Arena Club too.

After business decisions forced Pediatric Mobility to relocate on short notice, Wendy approached Arena Club owner, Keith Rawlings, about allowing Gabriel to continue his therapy sessions in The Arena Club pools. "I was a nervous wreck, but I knew I had to talk to Keith to see if he could help us," said Wendy. "It took all my courage, but I had to tell him about Gabriel and see if he would allow Pediatric Mobility to use The Arena Club pools." Keith did not hesitate. "God has blessed us with The Arena Club, which has given us the opportunity to help others like Gabriel and other children that attend Pediatric Mobility. I knew we had to help," shared Keith.

Having Gabriel and Pediatric Mobility at The Arena Club has been a true blessing to everyone involved. If you are lucky enough to meet Gabriel at the pool, you know there is something else at hand. One smile from Gabriel will melt your heart, make your day, and leave a lasting impression that you can't forget... magic.

In addition to aquatic therapy, Pediatric Mobility offers traditional physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy to children ages birth to twenty-one years old from their Forest Hill location. For more information, please visit www.pediatricmobility.com.

