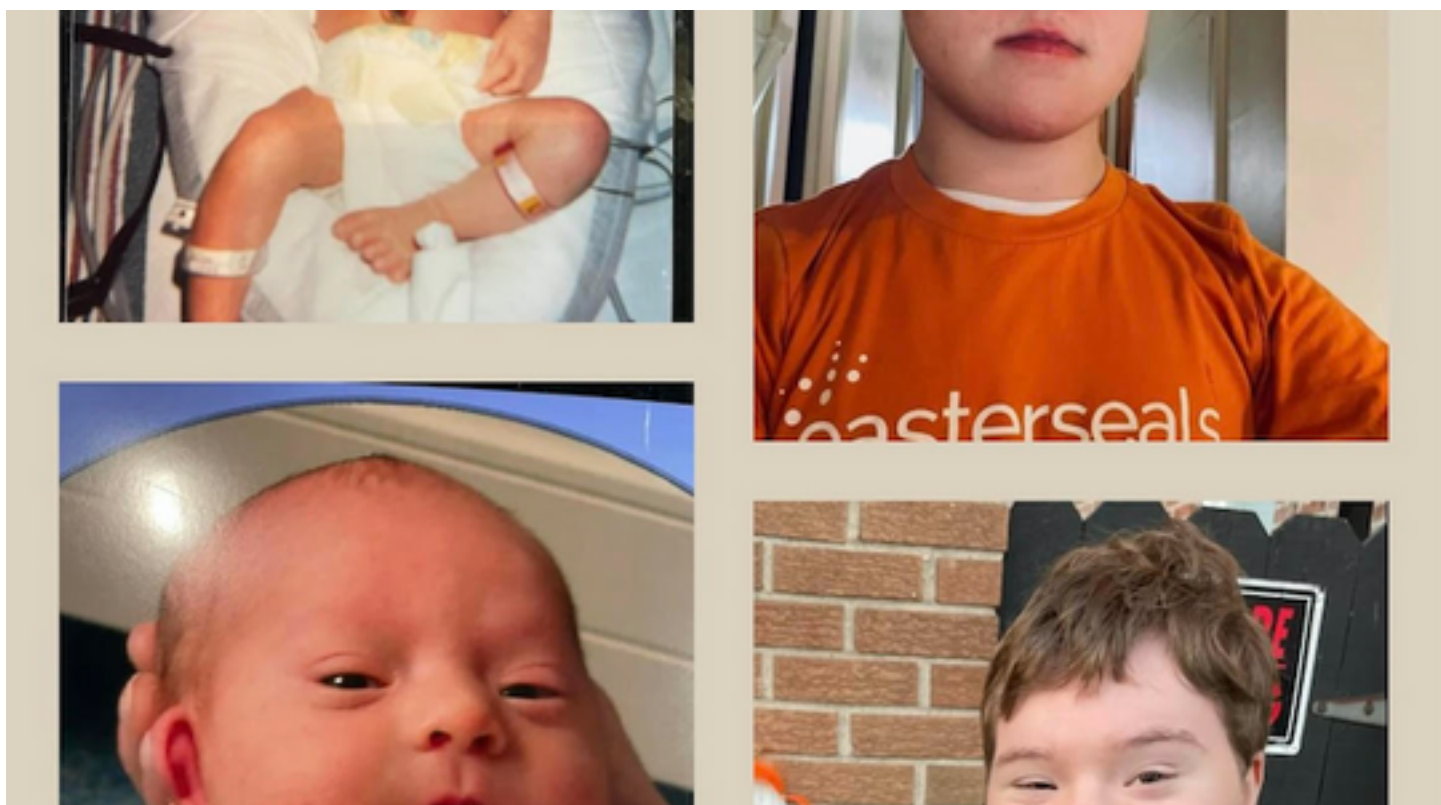


Student Colin Guerrero and Mom raise money for Easterseals Academy

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For his 16th birthday, Colin Guerrero, who has Down syndrome and autism, and his mom, raised \$2000+.

Colin Guerrero was born with Down syndrome, a genetic disorder that causes intellectual disability and developmental delays. Nevertheless, he grew to be a “vivacious toddler who hit all of his developmental markers as a child with Down syndrome,” according to his mom, Tracy. He could talk and read most of his sight words. He was active and interactive. Unfortunately, at the age of five, Tracy noticed changes in her son. He seemed to be regressing.

"I took Colin to multiple specialists, and he was ultimately diagnosed with autism. He became nonverbal and lost the skills he had developed as a toddler," says Tracy, who described the regressions as difficult to accept. "I'm not a person who ever gives up. My immediate thought was, 'What do I do next to help my son?'"

While Tracy mourned the version of Colin she'd come to know, she immediately went into advocacy mode. She started educating herself on autism. She went to ABA behavioral therapy classes. She hired an amazing nanny who has endless patience and who Colin adores, and perhaps, most importantly, she advocated for Colin to be moved from Chicago Public Schools into Easterseals Academy, an alternative school placement with three campuses for students with an autism spectrum disorder, emotional disability, developmental delay, or intellectual disability.

"After his autism diagnosis, Colin didn't hit any more developmental goals until he arrived at Easterseals Academy," explains Tracy. "I knew he needed more support in a place with small class sizes and other children and adults who were like him. I also wanted a place where he could grow over time and not have to be disrupted by moving to another school." Easterseals Academy serves students ages 3 through 22 with integrated therapies and instruction that is centered around evidence-based practices. Students have access to speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, nursing and social work, art therapy, music therapy, vocational training, adapted physical education and behavioral consultation.

Colin has been a student at Easterseals Academy for four years now, and even amidst the pandemic, he's been making strides and meeting milestones again. Tracy says, "It really takes a village to raise a child with special needs. Easterseals Academy is a crucial part of my village."

On December 22, Colin turned 16 years old. To celebrate, his mom asked family and friends to give birthday donations to Easterseals Academy. On Tracy's Facebook wall, she posted the following message with smiling photos of Colin.

"And in a blink of an eye, he's 16! Love this kid with all my heart.

Many of you know Colin was born with Down syndrome and later developed autism. For Colin's 16 birthday, he would like to donate his birthday money from all his friends and family to Easterseals serving Chicagoland and Greater Rockford. He has made great strides over

the past 4 years thanks to Easterseals Academy.

Easterseals Academy empowers each student to achieve peak academic performance and foster the acquisition of functional life skills for independence in the community. This is so key for all people with disabilities as they head into adulthood.

Please donate in honor of Colin. We are working toward a goal of a minimum of \$1,000 so we can get on the Giving Wall as Friends and Family of Colin Guerrero.”

Colin’s family, friends, and fans came through in a big way. They didn’t just meet the goal, they doubled it! Together, they raised \$2000 to support the programs at Easterseals Academy.

“I ‘m not surprised. I knew people would be generous. Colin has a very big fan base,” Tracy says.

If Colin has inspired you to donate, we thank you. You can do so on our website.