

Asher was adopted South Korea when he was 11 months old. We knew that he suffered from a neurological condition which had affected his development and that he was developmentally delayed. But we did not know that he was deaf. We found out a couple months later during a hearing screening.

When we found out he was deaf we immediately looked into the cochlear implant. We are a hearing family and we thought it would give him an opportunity to develop oral language. Within about six months of his arrival here, when he was sixteen months old, he had the cochlear implant surgery. We eventually enrolled him in an oral school. We thought we would try the oral method and we were hopeful that he would be able to develop good speech and also learn the typical preschool curriculum. But after about a year and half it was obvious that the oral approach was not appropriate for Asher.

We eventually received the diagnosis that Asher was Apraxic in addition to his deafness and it became obvious that he was going to require sign language in order to have a way to express himself, to have expressive language.

We felt it was really important that we find the right program for him and we knew that the oral method was not going to work. So, we started to search for other programs in the area. We live in Dayton and we were not opposed to driving to Cincinnati for school. We had heard about St. Rita and decided it was a good idea to come and take a tour. We were both blown away by what we saw here. We toured the Montessori preschool and were incredibly impressed. We were just amazed that St. Rita had a program like Sign N' Say that was geared specifically towards Apraxic kids and all of their very special needs.

When we came to St. Rita we saw that there were other ways to approach education and that education didn't have to take a back seat to language. Just because a child has a language disorder doesn't mean they can't learn.

I probably knew with certainty that Asher was in the right place within probably a month of Asher transferring here. He adjusted almost seamlessly to the classroom. When he started to come home and write his name for me and sign colors to me and sign letters...and press the buttons on the elevator...when I asked him to press number two and he pressed number two...I knew that he was in the right place. I knew that he was learning.

One thing I would say is come...come and visit the school. I visited several times and was incredibly impressed with everything that I saw at every level. And I've visited the entire school. I've seen the babies, the preschool, the Sign N' Say classroom, and K through twelve. I think if you are wondering what's happening here, the best thing to do is to come and look. You'll be amazed. It's a very enlightening experience to come and take a tour and to see what's going on each day in the classroom. You'd be surprised at some of the things that are occurring here. You'd be surprised at the level of education that is taking place here... and especially at the fact that children are being met at whatever level *they* are at. It truly is individualized education, as it should be.

I don't think Asher's future is limited by anything, by anyone's expectations, or any challenges that he has to overcome. I've seen from him in the short time at St. Rita that the possibilities really are endless for him. He can do whatever he wants to do. And I don't have the fear that Asher will be disabled by his disabilities. That's an overwhelming prospect...and so, the relief that comes from knowing your child is going to be *ok* is tremendous.

If I could say one thing to the people who contribute to the school, I would say this...these children are here *now*, and they need your support. St. Rita is producing adults who can participate and be vital citizens...people who are not impaired by their disabilities. They may have disabilities, but they are not *disabled*. And that's an incredible thing. It's very special work and it needs support. I hope that people would consider giving their full support because it means so much to these kids...and not just to these kids but to their families, and to the community at large.

I hope, I think like every parent does, that my child will be happy. I hope that my child will be loved. I hope that he will have friendships. I hope that he will be able to get a job and take care of himself...and go on to college or some secondary education. I hope that he can do whatever it is that he wants to do, and whatever it is that makes him happy.

St. Rita has been a home to us. It's been a shelter really...a port in the storm. I can't tell you the sense of relief that we've felt since he's been here. To see him succeeding and growing, and learning has been the single greatest thing that could have happened to him. His father and I thank God every day for the school because it has made such an impact on Asher. I'm just so happy. I'm just so thrilled for him. I think that his possibilities are endless because of the school. It wouldn't be that way without the school. No question about it.