

Running for a Reason: Deaf Child's Family Steps Up

For Vincenza and Daniel Garcia: it was simple. When their one-year-old niece, Giuliana Fullone, was diagnosed with severe hearing loss, they knew they wanted to do something special for her—give back somehow. But just mailing a check wasn't going to cut it. Instead, they decided to make an impact—run 6.2 miles through the most magical place on Earth: Disney World.

It's been said before that bringing a child into this world is one of life's greatest miracles. The melodic purity of their laugh; the high-pitched squeak of their first word; the soothing wave of comfort splashed on their face at the sound of a familiar voice. These gifts are ones that play on a blissful loop; engrained memories for parents that make it all worth it—make it all tangible.

But for some, those tangible gifts turn to intangible fears when things don't go as planned. And for the Fullone family, those fears became an earth-shattering reality the very day they found out their daughter, Giuliana, was unable to hear.

"The first thing I felt was shock—sort of like a trauma," Carolina Fullone, Giuliana's mother, explained.

With a trauma of this kind, it usually bleeds into the hearts of anyone in arm's length. In this case, it was Carolina's sister, Vincenza. "Our family was extremely worried for Giuliana. I remember thinking, 'Are her peers going to make fun of her or bully her because of her disability?' and 'What do we do now?'"



Numerous physician visits, inundated with new research and unfamiliar information, hearing aid trials, constant speech therapy—all of which failed to improve Giuliana's hearing—started to take a toll on everyone involved.

But Vincenza was behind them every step of the way—she knew that her sprightly, bright-eyed niece would come out of this stronger than ever. "Giuliana is extremely caring and thoughtful," she said with a full heart. "When I saw everything she had been through, I knew that she would emerge determined and strong-willed."

Because Giuliana's hearing aids failed, she became a candidate for cochlear implants. She was enrolled in the Nassau BOCES Hearing Services Infant Program five days a week and underwent two cochlear implant surgeries—all before the age of two. Giuliana then moved on to attend Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf, and this is where things began falling into place.

“When Giuliana first came to Mill Neck, her speech was nowhere near the level it is today,” recalled Vincenza. “Now she has more than 100 words in her vocabulary and has no signs of a speech delay. She speaks in complete sentences and communicates very clearly.”



Inspired by the sheer strength Giuliana possesses, Vincenza and her husband, Daniel, decided to participate in an event called runDisney, allowing participants the unique opportunity to run through Disney Theme Parks. In February of this year, Vincenza and Daniel ran the Disney Princess Enchanted 10k race at the Epcot center in Orlando, Fla., to raise money for Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf and to raise awareness for children who are Deaf or hearing impaired.

“Completing this event was a huge accomplishment and knowing that it was being done to thank Mill Neck Manor’s teachers was the motivation behind it all,” Vincenza continued. “Our hope is that Giuliana learns that through determination, perseverance and faith, she can achieve anything.”

Established in 1951, Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf provides the highest quality of services to children who are deaf and have other special needs from all social and economic backgrounds. Children are bused to Mill Neck daily from 49 Long Island School Districts, Queens, Staten Island, and Manhattan with the hope that one day they will have an opportunity to leave their mark on the world, just like everyone else.

For more information on how to help children at Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf, please contact Nancy Leghart, Director of Advancement, at 516-628-4243 or email nleghart@millneck.org. To find out more information about Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf, visit millneck.org.