



Meet Lisa & Eira

Their YMCA story wouldn't be possible without you.

The pool has become Lisa and Eira's retreat from the hustle and bustle of their daily lives. At home, therapists and case managers fill their spaces, mobility equipment is a permanent fixture, and unsolicited opinions make their way in. As odd as it may sound, the bright, busy and bustling Aquatic Center has become an escape from the demands of their daily lives. A moment for them to be together, uninterrupted, mother and daughter.

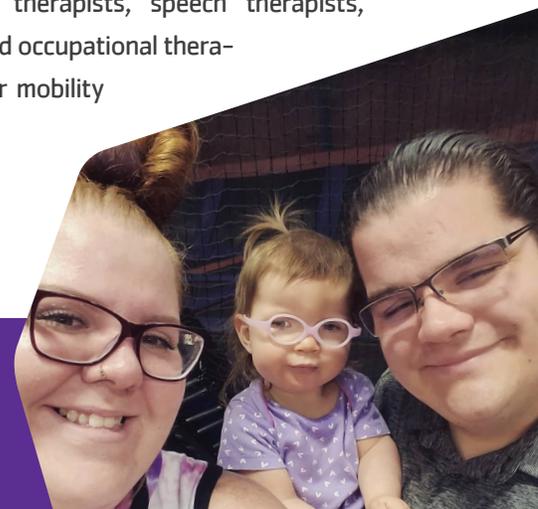
In 2016, Lisa and Eric learned they were expecting. Excited for the new addition to their family, they began to prepare for her arrival. Together, they went to Lisa's maternity appointments, they began to decorate the nursery, stocking it with onesies and cozy quilts. They saved up in their bank account, and they prayed for her safe arrival. When their daughter, Eira, was born, however, they quickly learned that their family would be faced with new and unexpected challenges.

Eira was born with Schaaf-Yang Syndrome, a rare genetic condition that causes low muscle tone, feeding difficulties, developmental delays, sleep challenges, intellectual disability, and autism spectrum disorder. When Eira entered the world, the hospital room was silent. Eira didn't cry, she didn't fuss or kick – she was still. Her nurses and doctors quickly bundled her up and brought her to the NICU, leaving Lisa and Eric alone. A dark cloud hung over the room, a sort of calm before the storm.

For 11 hours, Lisa and Eric were unable to see Eira. But then, for a brief moment, they were able to hold their daughter. Seeing her covered in IVs and tubes, the cloud hanging over them grew darker. Lisa and Eric were in shock. While welcoming their new child into the world, the expectation of how her birth was supposed to be clashed with the reality of what it was. They felt denial, grief, anger, and confusion. They did not get to hold their daughter again for 12 more days.

Lisa and Eric's journey into parenthood was not what they had planned for or expected. The journey that Eira and her parents have been faced with has been rough but, as time has revealed, it is a beautiful one. Every day, the family of three has continued to learn strength, patience, acceptance, and unconditional love. Their daily lives are now filled with miracles, big and small, that they never would have been witness to without Eira.

Eira is now five years old. She is a bubbly girl who loves Squishmallows, sparkles, and pigtails. While she is not able to walk, talk, or eat on her own, she lights up a room, shining brighter than everyone in it. Her daily schedules are filled to the brim, working closely with teams of physical therapists, speech therapists, vision therapists, and occupational therapists to improve her mobility and motor skills.



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Every day, the Y strengthens our community through programs and facilities that **teach, connect, heal, nourish and encourage.**



A couple years ago, Lisa and Eira had the opportunity to become members of the YMCA of Cass and Clay Counties through a financial assistance opportunity. In preparation for their first visit to the downtown Fercho YMCA, Lisa packed Eira's swim suit, life jacket, and flotation noodles and headed to the pool. At first, Eira wasn't too sure of her new surroundings but, with the help of her mom, she entered the water. From the moment she entered the water, she beamed, and you could tell that something inside of her just "clicked."

Visits to the pool soon became part of Lisa and Eira's regular routine. Eira began to recognize the Y and its many landmarks and faces. The new surroundings she was previously unsure of became a place of comfort. Every week, for an hour or two, Lisa and Eira would slip into the water to play. The water allowed them to see eye to eye. In the pool, they could hold each other, cuddle, and play effortlessly. In the retreat of the water, Eira could become more comfortable with her mobility and simply play and enjoy time with her mom. Without nurses, therapists, mobility equipment, unwanted opinions, or stares – it became their escape.

Eira has learned many things while in the water. The pool is where she learned to splash with her arms and lock her knees. **In a miracle of their own, floating together in the pool was the first time where Eira smiled and it was the first time that she looked into her mom's eyes.** Together, they have shared many more intimate moments in their new favorite place, the water.

Lisa and Eira are grateful for their moments in the pool together. In these moments, they can leave the demands of life behind. Lisa said it best – without the generosity of our donors, their time in the Y would not have been possible, and all the miracles, big and small, that have come from these gifts would not have happened.

When asked what she would say if she had the opportunity to thank the donors that made their membership possible, she said **"From the bottom of my heart, thank you. The hands we've been dealt haven't been easy for us to pay for. We didn't know how we were going to make ends meet. I hope you know that you're not just donating money. You're donating love. You're donating care, fun, happiness, and life. You're donating my most cherished memories with my daughter. You're donating the opportunity for Eira to see me in my happy place too. I can't put into words how it made me feel to see Eira smile for the first time. Thank you."**

Without the generosity and support of donors in our community, our mission wouldn't be possible. Thank you for helping the Y change lives. Our mission is stronger because of you.



provides a week of skill-building and exploration at Mini Camp, a program designed for ages 3-5.



provides one session of adaptive swim lessons which support individual abilities, needs, and goals.



provides a one-year membership for a family to build stronger bonds and grow healthier together.

