

NEWS FROM YOUR ELKS MAJOR PROJECT . . .

Dear Elks,

I am writing to express our gratitude for the tremendous benefit we have received from the California-Hawaii Elks Major Project, Inc. We have seen a remarkable transformation in the feeding of our 17 month old little girl, Olivia, since working with the very talented Occupational Therapist, Paula Rainey.

At a young age Olivia showed signs of poor growth; checkups at the pediatrician's office were often discouraging as we learned her weight percentiles declined at each visit. Mealtimes were challenging and frustrating. Olivia did not want to sit in her highchair, had little interest in eating, and would not drink. Trying to coax food into her was time-consuming and stressful; meals often lasted an hour, with little food actually consumed. We followed doctor's advice to bulk her up with extra butter and olive oil. But it wasn't enough, something was wrong. Consultations from the Gastrointestinal Department at Children's Hospital offered limited help; this was not a medical problem. Thankfully, our pediatrician recognized the need for OT intervention and referred us to Paula.

Over the course of three months, Paula's professional expertise, patience, guidance and keen sense of how to reach a child have made all the difference in helping Olivia. After observing her, Paula offered insightful recommendations on how we could best help our daughter. Through example, Paula equipped me with the skills I needed to help Olivia enjoy eating and become comfortable with food. She taught me how to make food fun for Olivia through dipping, licking, squishing, rubbing, and playing with food! With Paula's help, we constructed a positive home program to practice between meetings. Over the course of our weekly lunch sessions, Olivia learned that through experiencing her food's texture, smell, and color, eating could actually be *enjoyable and relaxing!*

While it may be easy to appreciate the physical need a poor feeder has for occupational therapy, it may be less obvious that there is a *mental toll* this feeding problem can take on the parents and caregivers. Before Olivia's sensory issue was identified, meals were stressful and loud - not at all a pleasant coming together of the family at the end of the day. Thoughts of how to increase weight and entice her to eat occupied much thought each day, every day. The entire family is affected by feeding troubles, not just the child. *Sessions with Paula changed all of this.*



A coin a day so they can walk, talk, see and play!

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What does mealtime look like now for Olivia? The once frustrated little girl who would reject nearly every food offered and would cry through a feeding is now happy to partake in the family meal. She will sit willingly, she will try countless new foods, she will eat independently, she will drink her milk (even request it excitedly) -- in short, *it is almost like watching a different child in the highchair*. Ordinarily, these may seem like simple milestones. For us, they mean so much.



I am glad I don't have to imagine where we would be today without the expert guidance of Paula and your program. Sincere thanks and heartfelt appreciation to the Elks for their support of this *much needed and valuable program!*

Best regards,

Sarah, Proud Mother of Olivia

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