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Working with nonverbal children is always a challenge, but working with a nonverbal, developmentally delayed 10-year-old who has Down Syndrome is another matter entirely!

Abigail was adopted by her forever family straight out of the hospital shortly after birth. After surviving numerous surgeries and other medical issues, she settled in with her adoptive family. She has received Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Speech-Language Therapy over the last ten years, but she has made slow progress due to her developmental issues. Communication has been the most challenging area for her to show progress.



Children who have Down Syndrome have an intellectual disability that is associated with deficits in language and verbal short-term memory.

Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC), along with functional, play-based approaches, help Abigail achieve her goals in communicating.

Children who are nonverbal need to be provided with various strategies to increase their functional use of language. The use of an AAC approach is a reliable way to promote communication with others and to increase use of language. AAC can be found in many forms: sign language, a gesture system, use of symbols, and picture/auditory devices ranging from low-tech to high tech. AAC includes all forms of communication (other than *oral* speech) that are used to express thoughts, needs, wants, and ideas.

Abigail has learned to activate a favorite toy by pushing a particular button.

AAC had not been utilized to its fullest with Abigail until January of this year. Due to her cognitive abilities, she had to be taught how to use this form of communication. She was

first taught how to use cause and effect in requesting "attention grabbing" modified toys that use switches to gain her interest.

In a short amount of time, Abigail has gone from just touching various switches to knowing which switch to activate to obtain her favorite toys. She is now beginning conversion to a low-tech speaking AAC device that allows her to pick from two choices the item she wishes to activate.

Abigail's world is beginning to open up into areas she could not access before. Thanks to the Scottish Rite, Abigail has a place to receive AAC therapy services that are providing her with life-changing communication alternatives!

Next issue...

The next newsletter will focus on child language.

We offer our sincerest appreciation for the continued support of the Scottish Rite, without which we could not fulfill our mission.