



Illinois' Sharing A Vision Conference 2007 “Proud Moments” Sample Family Story

Carla always does everything BIG in her life. She never keeps anything simple because she multiplies both the work and the FUN. That's why it shouldn't have come as any surprise that when Carla and her husband Walter decided to become parents that Carla delivered twins with special needs.

That changed their lives forever and Carla responded in her typically larger than life manner. She started an award winning family support group named PROUDD (Parents Resource Organization for the Understanding of Disabilities and Developmental delays) that not only undertook the usual info meetings, resources, and family socials but sought to open up inclusion within the community for families. The YMCA agreed to a monthly night at its gym for families whose children had special needs. The group got to have a whole local theater to themselves for movie night. Restaurants reserved a whole room, so kids with autism could practice the social adjustment of eating in public.

So when Miles, her son with autism, was ready to learn to ride a bike, it shouldn't surprise anyone that Carla made it a community affair. She found a national group, Rainbow Trainers, Inc. with a “Lose the Training Wheels” program that specializes in teaching children with special needs to ride a bike over a week. They take a child from the “I'm afraid to get on” stage, to the “Look, Mom, I'm flying stage” in five days. They also have all the adaptive equipment necessary to help special needs children succeed (like hold their foot to the pedal, or their body to the seat for instance). PROUDD co-sponsored the event with the University of Illinois. The sponsors sought donations to help families with the fees, volunteers to offer hands on help, and of course the press to share the children's success with the community.

At the end of the week the response was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. “It was cool that I was able to help them learn something that would be useful for a long time”, said student volunteer Jennifer. Melanie, mother of six year old participant Trent shared, “I was so happy to see the smile of success in his eyes.” Michelle, mother of eleven year old Dean echoed her sentiments, “There are few successes in the world of disabilities, so the success of “Lose the Training Wheels” is particularly sweet. Now Dean rides around and is not ashamed anymore of training wheels,” she said. “Biking may be the way for transportation for him because you don't know what the future holds. Our family goes biking and now he can go with us.” Now that's a PROUDD moment!!