

We believe in the promise of every person.



Ariana's Story

When Amanda and LeRoy Olson saw their daughter, Ariana, for the first time they knew that she had a long road ahead of her. She was born below normal birth weight and had a large soft spot in the back of her skull. Despite numerous tests, doctors could not immediately tell them what was wrong with their beautiful baby girl.

As Ariana started to mature, she also began falling behind in her developmental progress. She had low muscle tone and was not able to sit up on her own or feed herself. She did not make any of the early sounds that all parents long to hear from their baby.

"It was really hard to see her struggle," said Amanda. "The stress of not knowing what was wrong with her was terrible."

When Ariana was a little over a year old, she was diagnosed with Koolen-De Vries syndrome. This is a rare genetic condition that causes developmental delays, learning difficulties and can also include distinctive facial features, heart defects, kidney problems, and skeletal anomalies.

"The moment we had a diagnosis, we started to research her condition to find out what help she needed," stated LeRoy.

The next year, Ariana had numerous therapists and doctors working on her case. Amanda and LeRoy found the in-home therapy schedule overwhelming. They were also having a hard time keeping up with the costs of all the treatments.

"It was impossible to get all therapy in each week. There was no time for anything else," said LeRoy. "No play dates, no time to spend with family. The worst part was that we were financially struggling to pay for it all."

Then they found the Irene Wortham Early Learning Center Program.

At the Irene Wortham Center Early Learning Center, children ages six weeks to five-years-old with and without developmental challenges learn, play and grow together in a multicultural setting.

Children with disabilities have access to onsite pediatric speech, occupational and physical therapists. Therapists work closely with family members and classroom teachers to ensure that children receive the best possible care in every facet of their lives.

The combination of on-site therapy services and a high-quality learning environment with other children was ideal for Ariana. She began to show progress almost immediately.

Today, Ariana is 3 ½ -years-old and her therapists and teachers describe her as a shining star! She is walking on her own and feeding herself with utensils. The most exciting development has been her eagerness to communicate with her classmates.

"We know that Ariana is smart and is capable of doing amazing things," said Amanda. "We are so grateful to the Irene Wortham Center for helping her find her way."