

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

Elizabeth and Maverick

One summer, 2 years ago, life changed for my entire family.

My son Maverick was and still is rambunctious and loves to get into everything. But mostly he likes to get his own way...like most 7 year olds. He also has Down Syndrome and is nonverbal. He uses some sign language, but most people didn't know sign language and have a challenge understanding him.

Since he was born I have made it my mission to make sure that he is in the right spot with the right people who can care for him...the way I care for him. That meant that Mav was only with myself or select family member.

Since I've been accused of being a helicopter mom... I say why stop there! I am a BlackHawk, Seal Team 6 member diving in every day for my son!

I heard about WDSRA camps from another parent. I also heard my son could be partnered with a one-on-one staff at camp. That one-on-one was non-negotiable for me. I needed a way for Maverick to be safe and cared for. I needed to know that he would be ok. Would they take care of him like I would? Remember...helicopter mom.

I met Jorie at WDSRA. She took the time to learn about Maverick, his needs and his behaviors. She asked about my goals for him. She shared with me the qualifications for his one-on-one and how she could use sign language to work with Mav. She also explained the extensive training staff go through including background checks. Jorie kept answering my questions until I felt comfortable.

They also had a meet and greet event where families could meet the camp staff. Our whole family went.

It was still a leap of faith. But Maverick went to camp that summer.

It was the first time in his life he had somebody other than his parents let him do what children do. At camp he went to the pool and the splash pad. His one-on-one was with him at every step. She made sure he had the best time ever. Maverick loved it!

I felt this could actually work for us. Maverick loved it. And I felt comfortable because the staff were good at communicating with me...even though I probably wanted more feedback than other parents.

WDSRA changed our family. Because of the experiences we have had with them, I don't need to worry about finding a place that accepts and cares for him. I don't have to worry about whether or not there is going to be a one-on-one.... I know there will be.

Because of that, I know we can expand his ability to try more things. It has set a path for his future. There aren't many places that can do that.



That first summer, it was the first time, instead of running after Maverick, I was able to spend the time he as at camp with my daughter Mackenzie. That was something that would never have happened if Maverick was at home.

Mackenzie loves Maverick. But because of his needs, he has to come first. That's hard on Mackenzie. She needs a break too. WDSRA gives not only me respite from Maverick but Mackenzie too. Now, she gets 'mom time' and loves it. She is so excited she loves to plan our time together.

Being able to entrust Maverick to someone else, like at WDSRA, has given me an overwhelming sense of relief that I did not ever have before. The stress of strain what he's doing & how he's doing has been lifted for me. Having to always worry about Maverick, more than for Mackenzie, put a daily strain on my mental health. Now, I only worry a little, but it's immeasurable for me personally!

Having Maverick in a WDSRA camp let me take a step back and just be a mom...to both of my children. I know that both of my children are getting what they need from me. And at the end of the day that is what it is all about.