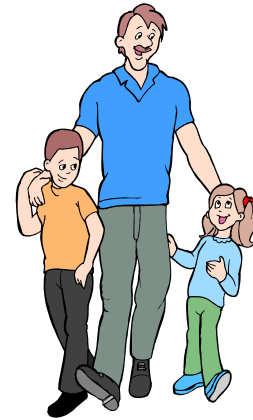


One Dad's Story

Written by Kevin Reuter
Caitlin, Michael and Kenny's Dad

Hi, my name is Kevin and I am a father to a really special girl, Caitlin. I am rather new at being a parent of any kind, let alone the parent of a special needs daughter. She came into my life six years ago when her mother and I started dating. I was not sure at the time about being involved with someone who had three kids, but then I met Caitlin. Caitlin managed to change my mind rather quickly about the whole situation. She was so loving and friendly when I met her that she came over and gave me hugs. That was the beginning of a wonderful and fantastic relationship.



As time has gone on Jillana and I were married and started our lives together. This of course included three wonderful children who I had grown attached to. Caitlin and I quickly bonded and at times became inseparable. We became play buddies, friends and some one to just laugh with. Along the way she has taught me so many things about life and she still continues to do so. The first thing she taught me about was unconditional love. She did not care about what mistakes I made or anything else I had done, she just loved me. That was and still is a fantastic feeling. I was the first man she signed Daddy for, telling me that I was her dad. It melted my heart and formed an even tighter bond between us. Not only has Caitlin taught me things; she has also learned some things from me. I taught her how to sign I Love You and she first signed this when I proposed to Jillana. I have also learned what it takes to be a part of Caitlin's special life as a parent.

After the first two years I became more involved with Caitlin's educational and physical needs. This included going to IEPs, doctor's visits, and anything else that I needed to attend. At this point is when I realized how great and strong a person Caitlin's mom, Jillana, was. I did not know that so much time and energy could be spent taking care of a child's needs. I was shocked that everything seemed to be a fight to get any thing done for Caitlin. I wondered why it was so difficult to get these things when typical children were getting there needs met easily. I just did not understand any of it at that time. Jillana started to inform me of all the procedures and paperwork that it took for anything to be done for our daughter. I was in awe that so much work was needed to see the results. I started to attend meetings and visits but I still did not fully comprehend all the details. I then became even more active mainly as a support for my wife and

kids at these meetings. I did not necessarily speak up at these meetings but I did start to understand the processes, details, and everyone's role there. I was just starting to grasp all this information but I felt like we were alone in our fight for our daughter.

I was just starting to understand what was going on and what needed to be done when Jillana brought me new information. She had information about parents getting together over a weekend to share information, the Family Learning Retreat. That first year Jillana and the kids were able to attend but I was not. I was not able to attend until Jillana had been to two retreats. The information she brought back with her was great. Since then I have attended the past three years. All I have to say is WOW. All the information that is available was a shock. I did not realize that there were so many other families out there with the same questions and similar problems. I quickly figured out that the whole weekend is a chance for every family involved to talk and offer support to each other. The exchange of information is just phenomenal. If you do not know something or know just a little, chances are that someone there has the information. I noticed all this in the first retreat I attended but I also noticed that there were a lot of moms and kids and hardly any dads. I wondered at this for a while but then got caught up in the whole weekend. The second year that I attended was pretty much the same as the first, mainly moms with the kids and just a few dads attending. This year though it was different in that more complete families were present.

It was a great time this year being held at the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind (CSDB) in Colorado Springs. The school and the staff organizing such a great event impressed me tremendously. The thing that made it great for me was that Caitlin, who had gone to school there on a diagnostic placement a few years ago, recognized where she was. It was incredible that Caitlin remembered the school and that she led us around the campus. The retreat this year was just fantastic. Not only did we learn some new information but we also met new families. It was incredible to me to see more dads taking an interest in what was going on with their children. Not only were they there but that they also knew what was going on. When I went to my first retreat I had no idea what was going on or what to expect. Since then I have become more involved with all my children's educational needs. I may not speak up all the time but I know everyone there and also what needs to be accomplished.

I learned so much at this past retreat that I do not know where to start. One of the main things I learned this year was about being a father in the complicated life of my daughter. It is not always easy to be everywhere I need to be some days but it is definitely worth it. Even though dads are sometimes overlooked in the whole process, we too have a place. We may not say much in the meetings or in doctor's visits depending on the situation but we still are important. We show that we support our children by attending doctor's visits and being at educational meetings. When we attend these events we show a united front to

the world with our wives about our very special children. There are times when we need to step forward when our wives are too stressed emotionally and physically to go to another meeting. I also have learned that sometimes our role is to keep things fun for our children. Dads are often called upon for many different forms of support but I am ready and willing to do whatever it takes for our children. Without this support my wife would be doing it all and that is not what this is about. The one thing that is most important to me is being a family and supporting each other. I have learned all of this in the very short time in being a part of this wonderful family. This is just one dad's story.



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