The Life-Changing Power of The Grace School

Just before his 2nd birthday, Dillon Collum was diagnosed with an extremely rare disorder called Bilateral Perisylvian Syndrome (BPS), which would change their lives forever.

“When the doctors told us what Dillon had, we were absolutely floored,” says Richard, Dillon’s father. “This is a disorder that affects less than 1 percent of children worldwide, and Dillon may be one of just twenty diagnosed in the United States.”

Dillon’s diagnosis shook the Collum family to its core; fortunately Meeting Street was there.

Shortly after Dillon was diagnosed, Richard and Josephine, Dillon’s mother, were introduced to Meeting Street and our Early Intervention program. Dillon soon began to benefit from individualized home visits and evaluations. Bilateral Perisylvian Syndrome is an inoperable condition that affects the brain, compromising Dillon’s verbal and physical development. Doctors have told them it is unlikely Dillon will ever be able to speak.

“Knowing that all children develop differently, we didn’t really have concerns about Dillon prior to his diagnosis,” recalls Richard. “The delays he was experiencing were masked in part by his young age.”

Thanks to Meeting Street’s Early Intervention program and the therapy he received, Richard and Josephine saw Dillon make significant progress. He began communicating his wants and needs and expressed his enjoyment with every visit to Meeting Street. The family then decided the best course of action was to enroll Dillon at The Grace School at Meeting Street, our inclusive school where children with and without special needs learn together.

“It was a process to transfer Dillon to Meeting Street, but to say it was well worth it is an understatement,” says Josephine. “Since he’s been here, he’s a much happier child—he even points to Meeting Street every time we pass the school on the highway.”

Now 9 years old and in the 3rd Grade at The Grace School—his third year with us as a full-time student—Dillon’s development has been nothing short of incredible.

Within his first six months, Dillon began writing his name. And, over the past year, his literacy has expanded; he is working on math skills such as addition and subtraction, and uses a computer to type sentences. To help Dillon overcome his non-verbal challenges, we’ve introduced an iPad to assist his communication with teachers and friends, and have been teaching him sign language. To keep an element of continuity between home and school, Richard and Josephine have also been taking sign language classes, which they say has been a huge benefit for both Dillon and two other children.

“One of the most important aspects of Meeting Street is the inclusive classroom structure, which challenges Dillon to succeed with everyone else in his class, regardless of their abilities,” says Richard. “None of Dillon’s classmates are judgmental, and I think that’s helped to make him more assertive and confident—he’s built some really strong friendships.”

Richard and Josephine love to hear the reaction of relatives who visit from out of state and marvel at the progress he has made, “leaps and bounds ahead of where he was” just a short time ago. His parents credit the expertise, experience and caring of the teachers and therapists at Meeting Street for changing his life.

“I wouldn’t want to think about what life would be like for Dillon, and our entire family, if Meeting Street wasn’t here,” says Richard.