

# Finding His Voice

Born without any complications, Michael Papaioannou was a happy baby with lots of energy. When he was six months old, his parents, Peter and Melissa, noticed that he wasn't able to sit up by himself or hold a bottle like many children his age. He was referred to KidsAbility and since eight months of age, Michael's incredible smile and positive, determined attitude are just a couple of the many reasons why he has endeared himself to everyone who has the pleasure of spending even a few minutes with him.

Michael was diagnosed with Lesch-Nyhan Disease (LND). LND is a rare disease and as his parents were trying to learn what this diagnosis would mean for Michael, therapists came alongside Peter and Melissa to help them learn how to become advocates for their son, how to work with him at home and to let them know that they were not alone.

"KidsAbility helped Michael, but they also helped me," says Melissa. "I wouldn't be where I am today without them, and Michael definitely wouldn't either."

Preschool, camps, physiotherapy, occupational and recreation therapies are just a handful of the programs and services that Michael has benefited from at KidsAbility. For Michael, his greatest personal achievement was found in augmentative communication services where he found his voice.

Michael is non-verbal but can clearly communicate through his Maestro — technology that he has learned to use at KidsAbility. Therapists taught Michael how to utilize his speech generating device to articulate everything that he wants or needs to say. This level of independence is something that Michael will continue to master as he grows.

As Melissa thinks back to their early days at KidsAbility, she recalls a specific therapy session with Michael's occupational therapist at the time, Susan. She watched as Susan's determination and patience with Michael confirmed that they were exactly in the right place to help him succeed.

"They cared about him just as much as I did and wanted him to reach his full potential," says Melissa of KidsAbility's staff. "They've given us a life and a future that is fantastic."

Melissa's passion to help build an inclusive community for every child makes her an invaluable advocate as a member of KidsAbility's Board as well as on the Family Advisory Council for Ontario Association of Children's Rehabilitation Services (OACRS).

"My biggest hope for Michael is to be happy. I want him to be fulfilled, be happy with who he is and what he can accomplish, and what he has accomplished."



*Michael Papaioannou &  
Melissa Papaioannou*

Kids Can't Wait Kitchener-Waterloo Ambassador  
2013–2014  
and KidsAbility Board Member