



persistence

| pər-sīs'tens | *n.*

Continuing a course of action in spite of difficulty

In most cultures, raising children takes the proverbial village.

We are born into a family and into a larger community. The May Center for Early Intervention (EI) in West Springfield, Mass., is a part of that community, serving children under 3 who have or are at risk for developmental delays. Just as every child has a unique mix of challenges, so do families. Yolanda's story is also the story of her family.

Several years ago, our EI team started working with 2-year-old Jason to address speech delays and social skill deficits. His parents, Amber and Wilfredo, have intellectual limitations; they didn't complete high school and aren't able to drive or work. Yolanda was born just as Jason aged out of the EI program. She was a preemie with no apparent delays, so she wasn't initially eligible for services.

May's EI staff re-engaged a year later when the family was asked to leave the overcrowded house where they were living. So Yolanda, Jason, Wilfredo, and Amber were moved to a hotel shelter. One month later, Willy was born — resulting in a family of five in a hotel room with one bed.

EI staff Alison Bartone and Pat Manning advocated on behalf of the family for more appropriate, stable housing. The five eventually moved to a larger hotel room with two beds; then to a family shelter where they met a case worker who understood their needs. She found them an apartment and now helps Amber and Wilfredo with tasks like paying the bills and keeping food in the house.

Pat started working with 1-year-old Yolanda who was not progressing as she should; she was not able to sit up, play with toys, or interact. She would cry constantly; no one could comfort her. When Willy was 6 months old, Alison joined her co-worker Pat in the home once a week in order to support both children.

Yolanda and baby Willy were on the same page in their skills and needs. No additional therapies could be introduced for Yolanda because she wasn't tolerating anyone in her space. For two months, Alison just sat on the floor with Yolanda and rocked her.

Eventually, they began therapy: playing, interacting, working on why she was crying. After six months, with the family stabilized in their

apartment, Yolanda was able to participate with occupational, physical, and speech therapists. After a full year of successful therapy, she turned 3 and was no longer eligible for EI services.

Yolanda was accepted into preschool in August. She's now talking nonstop, enjoys playgroups, and doesn't cry when away from mom or dad. Yolanda is still shy, but in a typical way. "She has come a long way," says Pat. "From not being able to look anyone in the eye... to this outgoing, happy little girl. It's such an encouraging result in a relatively short period of time; even more so considering the upheaval and challenges her family faced during her first three years."

Yolanda is engaging, social, and confident in her language with people she knows. She has come out of her shell and into her own little personality. "I'm no longer worried about her succeeding in school and socially," says Alison.

The EI team serves about 100 children with developmental delays. "We are often the first ones in when a child needs support," says Alison. "Sometimes there's only so much you can do for the kids until you help mom and dad, too." Willy qualifies for services until he turns 3, so Alison and Pat will be "in the house" and connected to the family for another year.

This work is emblematic of our commitment to supporting families in ways that will enhance an individual's progress and well-being, and to delivering services at the point of need. In the business of hope, everyone has a role to play.