



Katie Bergquist

"Katie is our miracle child."

Name: Katie Bergquist

Diagnosis: Delayed speech development and oral/eating aversion

Age began at Courage Center: 2

Time receiving Courage Center

services: November 2004 to April 2008

Services received at Courage Center:

Speech and feeding therapies

Gains made in independence: Ability to speak and eat



Sitting at the kitchen table, 5-year-old Katie Bergquist jabbbers like a magpie while eating macaroni and cheese. Her mom and dad, Josie Gagne-Bergquist and Bill Bergquist, watch their little tousle-haired angel with love and, they admit, not a little awe.

"Katie was born three and a-half months prematurely," Gagne-Bergquist explains. "I was in the middle of what I thought was a normal pregnancy, when suddenly, Katie arrived. We were totally unprepared for the complications that followed."

Katie was born at Children's Hospital in Minneapolis, where, according to Gagne-Bergquist, "They did a fabulous job."

Because of Katie's underdeveloped lungs, she was placed on a ventilator to help her breathe. Later, complications necessitated a tracheotomy, which remained in place for two years.

"During that time, we never heard Katie's voice," her mom recalls. "Air could not pass over her vocal chords. And she wouldn't eat orally, not even from a bottle. What little food we *could* get her to take from a bottle she threw up

because of severe reflux. So, after two months of diminishing weight, she was provided with a stomach tube."

At just more than 2, Katie's trach was removed and she underwent an operation to make her airway larger. "After 10 days under anesthesia, Katie awoke and made her first vocal sounds," Gagne-Bergquist recalls. "They were faint, but beautiful."

Their doctor referred the Bergquists to Courage Center for speech therapy, where Katie fell in love with her speech therapist. Katie saw her twice a week for the first month. "It took quite a while, but when it started, her progress was great," reports her mom.

In the second month, her therapist suggested Katie begin feeding therapy, so they added a third day to their weekly routine. "I was skeptical," says Gagne-Bergquist. "We had been told by a number of Katie's doctors – her gastroenterologist, her pulmonologist, her ear-nose-throat specialist, her pediatrician – all said Katie would have to go a special clinic in Virginia for intensive feeding therapy. We assumed we'd follow that advice, so we started feeding therapy at Courage Center just to prepare Katie for the more stressful ordeal we thought would follow."

Thanks to Courage Center, Virginia never happened. Vicki Markhart, senior speech therapist, joined the team of therapists working with Katie, and, like the other team members, she refused to give up. "Eventually, Vicki phased out speech therapy and focused mainly on feeding therapy," Katie's mom says. "Vicki help Katie get over her oral aversion to anything touching her mouth. She relieved Katie's fears, and, over a very slow process of many months and monumental patience, got Katie to eat."

In April 2008, Katie said goodbye to her therapists at Courage Center after three and a-half years of visits.

Today, Katie speaks with a soft voice because one of her vocal chords remains paralyzed from the tracheotomy. But she diligently practices speaking up. And the slender but tall-ish little girl eats everything from Cheetos to Chicken McNuggets.

"Katie is our miracle child," Gagne-Bergquist says. "Courage Center helped us see our way through a very difficult time. It would have been far more stressful without their help and encouragement. What would I tell parents faced with similar challenges? Hang in there. You can't possibly have all the answers, so look to Courage Center for truly expert help."

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