

## Alexi's Inspiration

### ***Because we love Alexi...***

We are volunteering and financially supporting the PRIDE Playground because we know wonderful things happen when a child has the opportunity to experience the joy of learning and accomplishment, especially when that child is disabled.

In August 2003 our baby girl was born visually impaired. After many specialists and numerous tests we were told Alexi had "global developmental delay".

We knew we needed early intervention services and our pediatrician referred us to PRIDE for Kids. When we walked in door we knew this was a special place. Many of PRIDE's staff have disabled children older than Alexi and were very supportive and excellent role models for us. We were nervous about making mistakes and felt we had to do everything "right". With the support at PRIDE we began to relax as Alexi's parents and really enjoy our beautiful, blue-eyed baby girl.

At PRIDE we received help from the blind school and had access to physical, occupational and speech therapists. Once each a week a very special physical therapist, Julie, came to our house and helped Alexi learn in her own surroundings. Alexi also attended a weekly class with other children taught by a teacher trained in early childhood special education. Class time was a fun for both the kids and the parents!

With encouragement and training from PRIDE's professionals we learned how to incorporate fun and play into a specialized program for Alexi. She enjoyed learning and was proud of all her accomplishments. We found a supportive community and met other parents. We laughed, cried, shared and became part of the PRIDE family.

Last June Alexi was at PRIDE learning to crawl! Crawling is an important milestone for any baby and this was a big thrill for us as she was 22 months old and the doctors were talking about wheelchairs. At PRIDE no one tried to predict what Alexi would NOT be able to do. Instead PRIDE's focus was on what Alexi COULD do and how to help her progress and learn new skills.

Later that same evening Alexi had a long seizure and was taken to Doernbecher Children's Hospital. Her friends and classmates from PRIDE came to visit. They came to hug, touch, talk and sit beside her. After 9 days in the ICU and an incredible fight Alexi died. Even in her death the PRIDE community stood beside us and helped plan a special celebration in honor of her life...held in the very space that will now hold the new PRIDE PLAYGROUND.



In honor of Alexi and all her special classmates we are helping PRIDE for Kids build a special playground. We are excited for all who follow Alexi who will experience the joy of learning in this special environment. Although Alexi's vision was limited she enjoyed sunlight and shadows and movement which helped her see and learn faster. She loved being outside and would have liked the opportunity to learn surrounded by outdoor sounds and smells.

The PRIDE Playground focuses on children with disabilities from birth to age 3. This special design helps children progress, develop and learn to their potential, all the while experiencing self satisfaction, accomplishment and the joy of play.

We hope you will join us and help PRIDE build this incredible outdoor classroom!

Jeff and Karen...and Alexi