

Mom wishes for new wheelchair for her disabled daughter

Jamiela Kersellius hopes for a lighter stroller or wheelchair that her daughter will be able to grow with.

BY JENNA FARMER

JFARMER@MIAMIHERALD.COM

Even though Atiriis Greene has a typical 7-year-old's Christmas wish for a Sony PSP, her struggle with cerebral palsy is very atypical, so her mother is in need of something a little more practical this holiday season.

“Atiriis has already grown out of her wheelchair, and it will take another two years before Medicaid will pay for another one,” said Atiriis' mother, Jamiela Kersellius. “The wheelchair she has now is so heavy, and I need something that will grow with her.”

Atiriis' battle with cerebral palsy began two weeks after her premature birth in New York, when she stopped breathing in the hospital, which left her physically impaired.

She is cognitively intact though, her mother said, explaining that Atiriis began to speak at just 9 months old.

“Instead of crying typical baby cries, she would try to speak. She had a different cry for each different need she had,” Kersellius said.

Atiriis hasn't stopped talking since.

“I want to be a math teacher!” Atiriis said with a laugh while sitting next to the tinsel-adorned Christmas tree in their Northwest Miami-Dade home.

“I think the biggest frustration is that she likes to be very independent, and so we are hoping for surgery or physical therapy that will help her become ambulatory. But for now, it's frustrating,” Kersellius said.

Many outsiders to the situation, and even Kersellius at times, underestimate Atiriis' intelligence.

“I thought the book she was reading in school, *The Magician's Nephew*, was too complex for her to understand,” Kersellius said.

“She said to me, ‘Mom, it's a kids' book, I completely understand.’ I should never assume with Miss Atiriis, because she always proves me wrong.”

Kersellius finds support through Parent to Parent Miami, a nonprofit where the specialists also have children of their own with disabilities.

“We offer support and help train families to understand what their rights are for their children,” said Jackie Acosta, a specialist assigned to help Atiriis and her mother.

The help she receives from Parent to Parent helps keep her emotions in check, Kersellius said.

“Sometimes it gets hard because you might think your situation is so horrible, but someone else's situation is 10 times worse, so Parent to Parent helps you learn to humble yourself and relate to other people,” said Kersellius, who recently became a registered nurse and hopes to one day be a nurse-practitioner.

Acosta nominated Atiriis for The Miami Herald's Wish Book because of the altruism she saw in Kersellius.

“She didn't want toys like a lot of the parents ask for; she needs something to help make Atiriis' life easier,” Acosta said of the wheelchair request.

That is not to say, however, that Atiriis doesn't enjoy toys. One of her favorites is her Hannah Montana karaoke machine she got for her birthday. When asked if she likes to sing, she simply replied: “Yea, baby!”

Read more: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2009/12/20/1392211/mom-wishes-for-new-wheelchair.html#ixzz0lkKPob4y>