Helping a Child Be the Best He Can

By LISA HAZELTON

My son, Nate, is a child with Down syndrome. He brightens faces wherever he goes. He is a blessing to our entire family and really just a happy kid who loves football, playing outside, hiking and music.

Nate can turn just about anything into his air guitar.

My dreams for Nate are the same I have for each of my children. I want Nate to be the best version of himself he can be.

Like any parent, I want my son to have every opportunity to succeed in life. He faces more challenges than others when it comes to his educational path, and I want to do everything in my power to make sure he has a quality education, so he can fulfill the purpose for which he was created.

Thanks to a new scholarship — a Personal Learning Scholarship Account, or PLSA — for Florida kids with special needs, Nate will have a more customized learning experience and we’ll be able to do more of the things that are working for him.

Like many children with Down syndrome, Nate has low tone and the motor development delays that accompany it. He also has cognitive delays.

We have learned that while it might take Nate a lot longer to learn something, he can and does learn well.

As a Florida home-schooled child, Nate will be able to utilize his PLSA funds toward things like therapists, curriculum, support tools, even toward college.

It will help break down barriers for him and further ensure he’s equipped for a bright future.

Since Nate was very small, we have been blessed by a tremendously talented team of therapists at Pediatric Therapy Services in Lakeland.

In the past, we have had to alternate our schedule of therapies, since only our physical therapy was covered by insurance.

With the PLSA, we will be able to establish a much more consistent schedule involving physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy.

Children with Down syndrome can learn. Like all children, they might learn differently. There might be different methods or tactics that need to be tried to figure out what motivates them. Every child is special, has value and deserves the best education we can possibly provide.

I encourage more families of kids with special needs to learn about PLSAs, eligibility requirements and how to apply for the scholarship.

Florida K-12 public, private and home education students with Down syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, Williams syndrome, and Prader-Willi syndrome are eligible. Families can learn more by visiting Excelined.org/Florida-PLSA.

[Lisa Hazelton is a mother of nine children, including six-year-old Nate. She lives in Lakeland.]