



Highlighting the Head Family Georgia Hands & Voices

Names of family members and a brief description of their "place" in the family.

Gregory Head - dad

Yolanda Head - mom

Garrett Head - Phillip's big brother

Phillip Head - Garrett's little brother

Which family member(s) has a hearing loss? Describe your family member's hearing loss (ie: cause of the hearing loss, amplification system used, educational setting, methodology).

Garrett James Head, born May 1, 2004, just couldn't wait to get here! He is the surviving twin of a premature birth that brought him to Greg and Yolanda Head at just 25 weeks gestation (a mere 1 lb. 7 oz.) We are not sure what caused Garrett's hearing loss, or even sure when it

occurred, but it was identified during the Universal Newborn Screening just before he left the hospital at almost 4 months old. We did confirm, however, that his hearing loss was not genetic. Immediately upon confirming Garrett's hearing loss, we immediately got him fitted for hearing aids and sought out resources to learn more about deaf and hard of hearing support services and communication options. We agreed that we wanted Garrett to be an oral communicator, but used sign language as a bridge, until we could research cochlear implants and the different CI companies. Our road was not easy and the first cochlear implant surgery was unsuccessful due to an infection, however, the second surgery went smoothly and Garrett was implanted on April 1, 2006. With one year under our belt, we are delighted with our choice (as well as the device - Nucleus Freedom by Cochlear America) and pleased with Garrett's progress. Currently, Garrett attends the Atlanta Speech School, where his 'learning to listen education' began at 8 months old. In addition to the Speech School, we have also worked with Georgia PINES, which proved an invaluable resource and support for Garrett and our family. Garrett is our gift from God and his hearing loss Garrett's gift to our family. We would never have known the depth of our love and support for each other, nor would we have met the amazing doctors, professionals and family-friends had we not been given his gift.

Identify your family's residence, school system, school.

Our family structure is pretty simple, Dad, Mom, Garrett and Phillip. However, our family support is quite dynamic because we have a wonderfully supportive family and extended family who are all committed to helping Garrett and who support our communication methodology. We are fortunate enough to have Mom stay at home to care for and advocate for Garrett. We have grandparents who live within 10 miles and pitch in with babysitting, doctor appointments, speech therapy appointments, school drop offs/pick ups and Ms. Betty who cares for us all.

Garrett's school (Atlanta Speech School) is loving and nurturing and committed to making sure that each child is meeting his/her full potential. Though we have decided not to go with our County's Oral program, we do hope that he will be mainstreamed into the school's general education program.

Describe your child's educational experience.

Garrett is always in a learning environment - sometimes formal instruction and sometimes playful instruction.

Our family uses every opportunity to increase Garrett's language through talking, playing, singing, sports, etc. For instance, we used the "Signing Time" videos when we were learning sign language. For a few months we had a deaf mentor from the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf - through GA PINES. He was in a 'regular' hearing church

nursery for 3 days a week. Currently, Garrett receives his education primarily through the Atlanta Speech School. However, he also receives instruction from speech therapy (CHOA) and until recently, our parent advisor at GA PINES. Everything from The Little Gym to Tiny Tots T-ball was used as educational tools.

What are the strengths of the individuals in your family? The weaknesses?

The strengths of the individuals in our family are varied and complimentary. Mom is the manager of schedules, disciplinarian, doctor, nurse, craft-maker and advocate. While Dad is the nurturer, researcher, risk management, question raiser, 'what if' asker, playmate, and is the most sensitive and perceptive of us all. Each of us helps to balance and compliment the other. Ms. Betty is our caretaker and is the most experienced with children. She is our voice of reason and sounding board for 'everything' baby & toddler.

How has Hands and Voices supported your family? or How do you hope Hands and Voices will support your family?

Hands and Voices has already supported our family in giving us hope that there will always be an advocacy group made up of parents/guardians/families for the sole purpose of being a resource for families with hard of

hearing and deaf members. They have already informed me of legislation affecting our son, of workshops for parents and professionals, of scholarships available for the D/HH and most importantly, introducing me to other families who share similar challenges and successes. We look forward to their continued support and hope to join them in any way to further their success.