

KIDS: Defending Children Born with Trisomy 21

by Leticia Velasquez



KIDS, which stands for Keeping Infants with Down Syndrome, is a pro-life group which consists of parents who love their child with Down syndrome and want to tell expectant mothers to accept these unique blessing from God.

This apostolate was born out of an email exchange between two Catholic mothers of daughters with Down syndrome who had absolutely no spare time for such an endeavor. I was a freelance writer with three growing girls who had just moved into a new home, and Eileen Haupt was a National Right to Life delegate, freelance writer, and home schooling mother of two.

But in spite of our busy lives, we knew it was time to act. Children with Down syndrome are being aborted in

our country at the horrifying rate of 90 percent! It was time to alert the public to this tragic loss.

I met Eileen through her comments on my blog *Cause of Our Joy*. Our friendship bloomed, and then led to activism. We had both been attending the March for Life for years and noticed that there was no group of parents of children with Down syndrome. Our fellow pro-lifers needed to know that our children are being targeted for abortion by doctors and genetic counselors, mostly due to ignorance about life with Down syndrome.

They see these children as incapable of learning, and achieving normal functioning in everyday life, with a short and unhappy lifespan. But this is an outdated picture, which we are determined to erase with the truth.

Even before abortion on demand was legalized by *Roe v Wade* in 1973, a

at three, and in many cases, children with Down syndrome are attending inclusive education classes in their local school.

My daughter Christina, age seven, is in first grade in elementary school, with an aide to assist her and multiple therapy sessions per week (speech, occupational and physical). Some mothers, like Eileen, are choosing to homeschool their children to give them one-on-one attention.

There have also been promising medical advances, such as life-saving heart surgery which has doubled the life expectancy of people with Down syndrome from 25 to 50 years. Even better, researchers like Dr William Mobley of the Down Syndrome Research and Treatment Foundation, are working on promising drugs which, within a decade, may help them think and remember

as well as their typical peers.

The future has never looked brighter for our kids. Now they have outstanding new role models with Trisomy 21 who are married, hold jobs, graduate from college, work as movie stars and even some who have accomplished singular feats like Karen Gaffney who swam Lake Tahoe.

And so we founded KIDS, which is part of a grassroots movement by parents of children of Trisomy 21, and in reaction to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists' recommendation that all pregnant women receive pre-natal testing for Trisomy 21.



KIDS made its debut at the 2009 March for Life in Washington, DC

majority of Americans agreed that abortion was justified in cases of Down syndrome. Until the 1960's, children with Down syndrome were "warehoused" in state institutions with little education or stimulation of any kind. Add to that the short life span of people with Trisomy 21, (a more accurate term) and you have a rather grim outlook. However, life has radically improved for our children with 'designer genes'.

Now, a child born with Trisomy 21 can be taught at home from birth by therapists and special education teachers to sit, crawl, walk, and talk. There are government-funded preschool programs



Sen. Sam Brownback meets 7 year-old Christina Velasquez at the 2009 March for Life

This kind of grassroots activism is already reaping positive results. The National Institute of Health dramatically increased funding for Trisomy 21 research, helped Congress form a Down Syndrome Caucus and passed the “Prenatally Diagnosed Conditions Awareness Act.” This legislation will help educate medical professionals and expectant mothers whose child is diagnosed with a genetic condition before they decide to abort their child. It will also provide information on the latest treatments and research, contact information of parent support groups, and a number for the long list of families waiting to adopt their babies.

But while Eileen and I agreed that this movement was good, it needed a firmer stand on the right to life of unborn babies because there is still a disconnect between advances in treatment of Trisomy 21 and the high abortion rate.

For instance, the National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) and National Down Syndrome Congress have just issued a joint statement saying that they are not pro-life organizations.

Their statement “Toward Concurrence” found on the NDSS website even joins the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and Genetic Counselor organizations in denial of the 90 percent abortion rate.

This juxtaposition of good news about Trisomy 21, and the sad lack of respect for life on the part of Down syndrome organizations and the medical community spurred us to create KIDS to bridge the deadly gap that continues to exist between the two realities of advances in Trisomy 21 and the 90 percent abortion rate.

In September, 2008, Eileen and I decided KIDS would make its debut at the 2009 March for Life in Washington, DC. Eileen designed our logo; a protective umbrella with the blue and yellow colors of Down syndrome and had signs and a banner printed up.

Next, we sent out a press release to the media and began talking to reporters from Life Site News, Life News, and National Right to Life News. Our efforts were included in a pro-life documentary entitled, “Silent Fall.” Jill Stanek, and Barbara Curtis featured our cause on their popular blogs and

Johnnette Benkovic mentioned our cause during her “The Abundant Life” TV program on EWTN.

As a result, dozens of participants contacted us and we were honored by the comments of Sandra Cano, (the plaintiff in *Doe v. Bolton*, the companion case of *Roe v. Wade*) who has become pro-life. Sandra is now a proud grandma of two boys with disabilities and voiced her appreciation of our cause.

Eileen and I met face-to-face for the first time in Washington last January 22 at the Blogs for Life Conference at the Family Research Council where we presented Senator Brownback and Representative Cathy McMorris Rogers with plaques to thank them for their advocacy for children with Down syndrome.

An hour later, we met up with the KIDS group at the National Right to Life Headquarters and were ready to march! We met more members along the way until we were 40 marchers strong by the time we reached Capital Hill.

What is in the future for KIDS? We have a new Facebook page with over 1300 members and we continue to write articles and do radio interviews to promote our cause. We are also watching legislation like health care reform to make certain that women are not pressured into aborting their babies with Trisomy 21 and that those with disabilities receive the same medical treatment as other Americans.

When Sarah Palin so proudly carried her son Trig in her arms on national TV during the 2008 election, Americans received a strong message of the intrinsic value of children with Trisomy 21. KIDS hopes to keep that message fresh in the minds and hearts of all Americans.

Leticia Velasquez is a nationally recognized author on faith and family issues.