

Meet Ema

Ema Zapata was born on September 4, 2014 in Puerto Rico. Her parents, Ramón and Mailín had been told that there was a high probability that Ema would be born with Down syndrome, but regardless of her diagnosis, they were steadfast in their determination to give Ema the best life possible.

After a difficult labor, Ramón and Mailín were told they would be lucky if their new daughter survived the next twenty four hours. During delivery, Ema had ingested nearly all of her amniotic fluid, resulting in her coming dangerously close to drowning. Immediately after her birth, doctors rushed her to the operating room. Ramón was left to give Mailín the news about Ema's status. Ramón describes it as one of the worst nights he's ever experienced.

That night, while waiting for word about the status of his daughter, Ramón got on the internet. He knew that Ema had been born with Down syndrome, and he wanted to learn as much as he could about the condition. After doing an initial search, it became clear that Puerto Rico would not have the type of services that his daughter would need to succeed. Ramón decided to broaden his search and looked up Down syndrome clinics in the United States. Hope Haven was the first thing that popped up. In the blur and stress of the night, he wrote an email to the address listed on the Down Syndrome Center's page, detailing his family's story, and not expecting to hear back.

Ema made it past the twenty-four hour window. Doctors warned Ramón and Mailín that the damage from her delivery might be too much for Ema to overcome, but their fears were never warranted. She remained in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) for two weeks before leaving fully healthy.

Upon receiving an email response from Hope Haven, Ramón was shocked; partially because he had forgotten sending the email, and partially because he had never expected a reply. The email expressed concern for Ema and the Zapata family as well as contained information about the Down Syndrome Center at Hope Haven. When the email was followed by a phone call, the Zapatas knew they had found the right place for their daughter.

Ramón and Mailín scheduled their first appointment with Hope Haven in November 2014; when Ema was just two months old. Upon arrival, Ema's actions were limited. She had "very little facial recognition, not a lot of movement, and was very mellow." Their therapists in Puerto Rico had informed the Zapatas' about everything that Ema could not do, so when they arrived at Hope Haven, their hopes were low.

When Ema met with Hope Haven staff members, she was instantly responsive. Ramón described it this way, "Hope Haven made Ema light up. She had smiled before, but never at a stranger. When she got here, it was like we started to see life on her face. It gave us hope." Everything that Ramón and Mailín had been told Ema would never accomplish by their therapists in Puerto Rico was reversed by the team at Hope Haven. The staff's outlook was overwhelmingly positive. It was refreshing and exactly what they needed to hear.

When Ramón and Mailín returned to Puerto Rico following Ema's appointment, they began to discuss moving to Jacksonville to continue services for Ema. They knew that Ema would not get the type of services necessary for her to succeed in Puerto Rico and felt that Hope Haven was

the right fit for them. Ramón began sending out his resume and applying for jobs in the Jacksonville area. Shortly thereafter, he was offered a position, and the family moved to Jacksonville.

After three and a half months of being in Jacksonville and working with Hope Haven's team of therapists, Ema is now able to sit, crawl, babble, and eat. The progress that their daughter has made in such a short time is amazing to Ramón and Mailín. They are beyond pleased with the results of their decision to move and cannot wait to see everything that Ema will accomplish with the help of Hope Haven's dedicated staff.

The Zapatas, like more than 5,000 other families in our community, rely on the services provided by Hope Haven. Please be a part of their plan for a brighter future by giving generously at the link below today. With your generosity, we will ensure that every child or young adult has a rich life; unrestricted by whatever physical or developmental barriers they may face.