

HELP FOR GOOD

Lilli



Stark County
Board of
Developmental
Disabilities



Lilli

Meet 22-year-old Lilli Fontana, a graduate in the RS Southgate School Class of 2023.

According to mom, Amanda Fontana, Lilli was born with Congenital Cytomegalovirus (cCMV) which has caused developmental disabilities, cerebral palsy, epilepsy and profound deafness.

“When we found out that Lilli was Deaf, we started learning American Sign Language (ASL) and using it with Lilli. From age 3 to 10, Lilli went to Starlight school in New Philadelphia, and then transferred to Ohio School for the Deaf in Columbus from ages 10 to 13. Here we were all able to learn about and fully embrace Lilli’s Deaf culture and expand on her language skills and cultural norms.

At age 13, Lilli started attending Southgate School which was closer to home. Lilli had wonderful supports around her including her interpreters and Deaf mentor which are imperative for students in the DeafPlus community. Lilli has flourished in her abilities with her team at Southgate. I hope they all know what a positive impact they have on all of our lives. Lilli loves going to school to see her friends and delights in herself when she knows she has done a good job with her work.

Melissa Welsh, Educational Interpreter, Greenleaf Family Center, CSD, Community Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, has worked with Lilli for that past three years while she was at school.

“Lilli has been a true joy to interpret for the past three school years! We have developed such a positive rapport and she has taught me much about working with DeafPlus individuals. Lilli loves coming



Lilli with Melissa Welsh, Educational Interpreter

to school and gets so excited every day when she comes in the doors. Her smile is infectious and she can make anyone's day as she passes them in the hall or sees them in class.

She has increased in her ability to sign longer sentences as she uses 3-5 or more sign combination sentences with her peers and adults throughout school. Lilli has shown so much growth through her use of ASL signs as well as communicating her wants and needs. She is a hard worker and is happy when she is understood by those around her. She has been building on her ASL vocabulary through the use of modeling through example, ASL picture cards, and exposure.

We've had many "lightbulb" moments and that has really been rewarding to see when she understands and makes connections.

Language is such a vital part of our everyday life and Lilli has been thriving with access to communication. She is a proud, Deaf young lady with a bright future and I've been so fortunate enough to work with her. Lilli has touched my life in such a positive way and will always hold a special place in my heart as her interpreter!"

Amanda also said, "Outside of school, Lilli enjoys going to camp with the supports of her ASL interpreter and Deaf mentor where she goes on the zipline, kayaks, and helps with the small animals. She loves to go on vacations with her Nana, Papa, Mom, brother, Ethan, and sister, Lena, to the beach where she gets to ride jet skis and parasail.



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Lilli is funny, sweet, smart, observant, strong, genuine, and inquisitive. She is a determined young lady who has overcome many of the obstacles that have been put on her path. She continues to inspire not only our family but all of those around her. She is the shining star that leads our way.

Our hope for Lilli after graduation is that there will be a change in state and/or local policy that will allow people like Lilli, who have disabilities and are also Deaf (DeafPlus) to be able to go to day programs/workshops and have access to language through the use of ASL Interpreters so that accessibility and inclusion can be achieved.”



Lilli celebrates her achievements at the 2023 High School Student Awards in May.



Lilli, 2023 Prom Queen, dances with Stark DD Superintendent William Green.