



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

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## **COUNTY'S MEDICAL THERAPY UNITS: A PLACE FOR MIRACLES** ***4-Year-Old Delaney Walks Thanks to California Children Services Therapists***

For a child they thought would never walk and might even struggle just to move, it's hard to keep up with 4-year-old Delaney Cervantes nowadays. Every time he visits the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency's (HHS) California Children Services Medical Therapy Unit (MTU), he has to make laps around the building when he gets there and before leaving – handing out hugs and smiles to the therapists and staff that have worked with him since he was eight months old.

Delaney has been through a lot. He was born with a congenital heart defect, suffered a stroke when he was just three months old, has a pacemaker and suffers from hemiplegic infantile cerebral palsy, which causes him to favor his right side.

"I was hoping that he would be able to move around, and I wasn't even sure he would be able to do that," said Vianey Salgado-Cervantes, Delaney's mom. "The love that he receives here (at the MTU) and the time they spend working with him and listening to him is incredible. He comes in and hugs them all, and it's everyone, not just the therapists. He loves to come here."

Salgado-Cervantes describes how it was a struggle to even lift Delaney's arms for simple tasks like bathing and dressing him. But determined parents and weekly sessions with the occupational and physical therapists at the MTU have Delaney walking and even riding a bike.

"At first it was real hard to see him struggle and cry, but his first therapist here put in so much effort and I saw how much she worked with him and pushed him," said Salgado-Cervantes. "He would fall on his face and she would say, 'no, you can do it,' and now he's really confident and never afraid of falling down.

"If he does, he gets right back up. They have taught him to never give up and he's always confident he can do anything."

Sharon Kunugi is one of the therapists that works with Delaney. She works on his fine motor skills and has been his occupational therapist from the beginning. "He came in as this little guy," she said. And now? "He has a lot of spunk and is motivated. He's just a go-getter and always up for a challenge."

Kunugi spends time working with Delaney on tasks such as matching shapes, connecting items and playing with Theraputty to increase finger strength and other motor skills – the necessary skills that will help Delaney in every day functions such as dressing himself and opening doors and drawers.

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“He’s made lots of progress with using his hands and grasping,” said Salgado-Cervantes, noting that Delaney gets out his shoes and socks and helps get himself dressed now. “People will ask which side the paralysis is on because they can’t tell anymore. That’s just awesome.”

Michelle Aquino is the physical therapist working with Delaney. Her task is to improve his mobility and ability to get around on his own. She spends her time with Delaney having him walk on a series of buckets, climb stairs and Delaney’s latest accomplishment – riding a bike.

“He rode a bike for the first time (at the MTU’s recent adapted summer camp),” said Salgado-Cervantes. “I was real impressed and now he’s been asking me for a bicycle.”

The skills Aquino is working with Delaney on have allowed him to do such things as ride the school bus to preschool and play on the playground with other children, according to his mother. He just finished his first year of inclusion preschool and was promoted to year two.

“Being in this program has been a big help,” said Salgado-Cervantes. “I would recommend it to any parent. They should talk to somebody here and they will be able to help you.

“I feel so fortunate,” she continued. “It’s a real comfort to us to know someone else cares about us and knows what we are going through.”

California Children Services (CCS) is a statewide program that provides treatment for children with certain physical limitations and chronic health conditions or diseases.

***PHOTO CAPTION: Michelle Aquino, left, a physical therapist with the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency’s California Children Services, works on a coordination exercise with 4-year-old Delaney Cervantes. Delaney was born with several complicated medical issues and they thought he might never walk. But after weekly sessions with the therapists and the love of determined parents, Delaney not only walks, but runs around on the playground and just started riding a bike on his own. (Photo courtesy of the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency).***