



My Daughter, Sabrina, attended the Down Syndrome Research Institute (DSRI) Summer School Camp in London from July 4-28, 2006. As a parent of a 12 year old with Down Syndrome, I found the school to be excellent for her development.

As a parent, I appreciated the kindness and understanding with which my daughter was treated. The staff were all professionals. They treated each child as an individual, yet the group of students grew as a whole over the four weeks.

The students in the secondary program were taught good life skills. They were taught many different skills that benefited all levels of learning. For example, they were taught how to take the city bus and use transfers, and how to order and pay for a meal at a restaurant. This was good because it built the students' confidence levels. Now Sabrina always wants to pay when we go to the store, not only when I use cash, but also when I use my debit card. I am sure that she will soon know my PIN number!

One of the things that has always been hard for Sabrina is math and number sense. At DSRI, the students were not taught that there are four quarters in a dollar, but they were taught the more important skill of what they could buy for a dollar.

After spending four intensive weeks at the school with a speech therapist, Sabrina's speech has improved immensely. The constant reminder by the staff to speak in sentences has really helped her. When she is at her regular school, her education assistant does not have the time to constantly remind her to speak in sentences because she has two other students who take priority.

As a parent, it is very important to learn how best to teach my daughter. For example, I now constantly remind her to speak in complete sentences, and I can see how much this is helping Sabrina.

The best part about the summer school experience was that Sabrina could understand the teachers all the time. In her regular school, the teacher is talking over her head to the other students at grad six level. This is not the level that Sabrina is at. At DSRI, the teacher spoke so she could be part of the class for the entire day, not just for an hour or two.

I was also part of the staff for the DSRI Elementary Summer School Camp. As one of the staff members, I saw how important it was for the students to begin intensive speech therapy at a young age. This will allow them to speak in sentences at a younger age.

I also witnessed the many classroom situations that the students were part of. The students learned how to take turns, they spoke to each other, and they ate together. I always found it so sweet that the students would speak to each other, and even though the adults sometimes had trouble understanding them, they always seemed to understand each other. All of these important situations promoted their socialization.

One of the other great aspects of the summer school, both at the elementary and secondary levels, is that the students learned ideas related to a theme. The elementary students had a water theme, and the secondary students learned to 'be a friend'. This gave a purpose to their learning, made learning fun, and it allowed them to learn words related to one particular theme.

I know that Sabrina will always remember this summer because she enjoyed going to school every day. Even though she may not be able to articulate exactly what she did every day, the staff at DSRI also facilitated that aspect with scrapbooking classes. Now when Sabrina opens her scrapbook filled with pictures and work samples, her summer will always come back to her.

**Darlene lavazzi
Parent and DSRI Staff Member**