

My name is Tracy. I am a disabled, 29 year old, single mother, of a beautiful, smart, and very active now 7 year old little girl, Vanessa.

I remember back when I was a little girl, memories of enjoying the YMCA, going to preschool there, and taking swimming lessons along with my brother. And when I had a little girl and learned that they had a program, Wee-Tots, for toddlers starting at the age of 2 1/2... I knew I wanted to start Vanessa on her social skills in a safe environment where she would also be learning basic skills needed to get ready for preschool; in hopes she would have good memories such as I did. And this is just the beginning for us at the YMCA.

The Y staff, along with my mother, Donna, and I have watched Vanessa grow up over the past 5 years at the YMCA. It wasn't always easy with the old building at the YMCA. When Vanessa started Wee Tots, the YMCA just started plans on undergoing the process of expanding and building the new YMCA. At that time, I had to deal with the obstacle of stairs. There was a few times I was strong enough to do the stairs with my crutches, but most of the time I would say goodbye to her from the car. It was hard for me because I always wanted to go inside with Vanessa, say goodbye, meet the other children, and watch her interact with them, but I didn't have access with the wheelchair. Lucky enough, I had my mother to take her in for me. My mother has always been there with us for everything.

With the new YMCA, it is all handicapped accessible. The Lobby, Classrooms, Gyms, Pool, Locker Rooms and Bathrooms, Work out Gym, to now even Physical Therapy. Vanessa had a birthday party at the YMCA in the old building and that was so-so. And when she decided to have another, after the new YMCA was

finished, I didn't miss anything and was able to watch and enjoy her enjoy herself! It was great!

Vanessa has gone from Wee-Tots, to Preschool, where she was introduced to the pool, then preschool camp in the summer, to being extremely active with all of their younger kids programs and youth age programs. She has been able to experience and enjoy swimming lessons, T-Ball, Soccer, gymnastics, Summer Programs and sport camps, Bible Camp, Hip Hop Dance week, Punk Rope, British Soccer Camp, Softball clinics, cooking class, Flick N' Floats - where the children get to go swimming and then watch a movie, and Vanessa's new favorite, Drums-Alive. It is such a great program! I'm sure I may even be missing a few that she participated in. She loves sports and always looks forward to seeing what programs are coming out next. She's continually doing something, usually back to back programs and a few times a week.

The YMCA offers such a variety of programs from taking care of infants, to school and after school programs, for young and older adults and even senior citizens. There is something for everyone here to enjoy! And if you are waiting for someone, they have a nice lobby with comfortable seating, TV's, and Ping Pong for the kids.

I am now starting to be able to do things at the YMCA for myself. I just started taking an arthritis class in the pool, enjoying open swim, the steam room and sauna, the workout room, and physical therapy. And it's all in the same building which makes it so much easier for me!

But, most importantly, all this would not be possible without the scholarships and financial assistance I have received for everything. It is just me and my little girl and I'm only on

disability. So none of this would have been affordable for me, and Vanessa would have missed out on who she is today. I feel Vanessa got a head start with school and is so incredibly smart and active, and she needs that in her life. She is a very high energy kid. I feel so blessed and will be forever grateful for the experiences we were given here at the Greater Carbondale YMCA. I really feel it has shaped who Vanessa is today as a very well rounded, smart, and active child. I'm very grateful we were given the opportunity for her to experience a little bit of everything, and now I can actually enjoy watching her do these things. And seeing how she was lucky enough to have all of this at such a young age with being so active, I can only hope it will help her grow into and lead a very healthy and active lifestyle. And now I can feel involved too! It feels great to be a part of the new YMCA. It's amazing how there can be so much for one person or a whole family to do here, all in one place, one building!

THANK YOU YMCA

Tracy & Vanessa Hodges

And I can't forget Grandma- Donna Hodges- For without her... none of this would of been possible with out her, her love, and dedication to us! So I want to extend my Thank You to you too MOM!