

The Molly Ann Tango Memorial Foundation Helps Francesco
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Picture: Francesco Cipollone age: 17 months

Francesco's story began a year ago when he was just 6 months old. He was born at 36 weeks to his proud, loving parents Iowa and Dominic and big sister Isabella. All appeared well until they observed his lack of development. Tests confirmed every parent's worst fears that there was indeed something wrong with Francesco. He was diagnosed initially with hydrocephalus (fluid build up in the brain) but in a matter of hours, the diagnosis given to his parents was Lissencephaly (smooth brain), a malformation of the brain causing severe mental retardation and poor control of movement. Their life as they knew it would never be the same. They began educating themselves and entered the world of raising a child with special needs. Their journey began with the Connecticut Birth to Three Program, Project Interact, Inc., which strengthens the capacity of families to meet the needs of children with developmental delays and/or disabilities. Here they learned of the Molly Ann Tango Memorial Foundation, established in 2004 to give guidance and financial support to families of children with special needs. Iowa contacted the foundation through its founder Todd Tango and through conversations realized Francesco's diagnosis closely matched that of Todd's daughter Molly. No one could have known at this point what this connection could mean for their lives.

This past spring Iowa and her family desperately wanted to attend a Lissencephaly conference in Indiana. They wanted to meet other families and learn from the experts how best to care for Francesco. Like so many families raising children with disabilities money was tight. But knowing how important an event such as this would be they made a request through the foundation. Their need was granted and off they went in search of answers and support. Iowa describes the conference as a life altering event. Here they met Dr. Dobyns, the head pediatric genetic neurologist doing one of the only research studies on Lissencephaly and other rare brain malformations. After meeting with Francesco and his family Dr. Dobyns strongly felt that Francesco's diagnosis was mild Cerebellar Vermis Hypoplasia (underdeveloped cerebellum). Had they not attended this conference they might not have known this for quite some time. Francesco's parents feel that they have more hope and can better understand him and his needs. They thanked the foundation by writing: "Helping my family finally put the right kind of tears in my eyes...happy ones. Thank you Molly up in heaven for still making people smile!"

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