

Our family would like to thank SkyKids for the positive impact our experience had on our family. It is important to us to share the details of how one event many years ago has touched our family to this day.

On April 14, 2012, I brought my three children to your event in Glendale, AZ. Like many parents, I felt that exposing my kids to opportunities to experience things they couldn't otherwise experience. This was the first year this event took place; we had no feedback to test the water of what the event would be like besides a flier. Bravely, we drove down to the event in Glendale from Northern Arizona.

At the time, I had no idea what a meaningful gift this event would be. Each child was given the opportunity to go on their flight. My older children had fun, but they were glad they were on the ground. On the other hand, my youngest son, Elias, was seven years old; he got off the plane, walked up to me, and asked, "What is it called when you are working on a plane?" I explained the job would be a mechanic. He said, "Well, what is it when you design or improve the airplane?" I explained that this person would be an aeronautical engineer. His immediate response was that he wanted to be "that." He never wavered from wanting to be an aeronautical engineer throughout his childhood.

After the event, Elias couldn't wait to tell everyone that would listen, what he wanted to be when he grew up. Many parents, teachers, and professionals said I shouldn't encourage this mindset. After all, I needed to understand that he has special needs. I didn't know why he couldn't pursue his dreams. I decided if this isn't 'normal,' what innovative thing can I do to make this happen for him. I and his physicians understood his conditions, and what he wanted so as a team; we decided to help bring this "impossibility" to reality. At this point, I understood I was parenting an outlier.

Elias spent all his summers and school breaks studying while his peers enjoyed themselves. He understood that an engineering degree required lots of math and science. Elias signed up for every math class to the point that he had math as elective classes. There was a lot on the line for him; he could not slack or think he could relax. The world was his competition for the universities he wanted to attend. Waging against the odds, he strategically made decisions inching him closer and closer to achieving his goal to enroll in an undergraduate aerospace engineering program.

Elias has endured numerous hospitalizations and medical procedures. He's learned to manage his health care needs as independently as possible to gain the ability to stay at the university like every other student. Elias pushed himself to this goal in an unconventional way. He started with going from a school without the belief that his vision of becoming an engineer can be achieved with an Individual Education Plan (IEP); to a private school general education; to ASU Prep without an IEP or 504 plan. Elias worked hard to maintained honor roll since preschool. Elias can say he earned opportunity to apply for this degree because he worked hard and earned it every step without using his disability as an excuse; he just dug deep to prove he

could do it. He also has sacrificed many times to help his siblings with their medical conditions and disabilities, reaching outside of himself to help his siblings achieve their dreams and goals. Elias has spent many hours locating scholarships to ease the expense of going to a university for his family, which is another example of his understanding and independence within his new life as young adult.

We are proud of Elias and his siblings for their achievements. We want to thank Sky Kids for the seed that grew into a vision and is now becoming a mission.