

A Journey from Fear to Hope: the Holt Family Story

Imagine lifting your typically developing infant out of his crib one morning and having him go limp in your arms.

On October 3, 2014, Mitch & Elisa's six-month-old son Noah was suddenly paralyzed from the waist down. They rushed him to Beverly Hospital and were transferred to Boston Children's where they got the diagnosis: Acute Flaccid Myelitis, a rare inflammation of the nerve cells in the spinal cord, believed to be caused by a virus.

"It was terrifying. It took all of his strength to lift his head and at one point he couldn't lift his arms," recalled Elisa.

After nine days at Children's Hospital and outpatient physical therapy at Mass General, Noah was referred to Northeast Arc's Early Intervention - Cape Ann program for long-term support.

"We were scared. I was afraid I was going to hurt him when I was stretching him, but they showed us how to stretch him and how to help him with therapeutic play," said Elisa.

Noah's Early Intervention team includes Jenna Elie, Physical Therapist; Kim Pelletier, Developmental Specialist; and Kristtyn Suarez, Occupational Therapist.

"The girls who come in are like family. Noah looks forward to seeing them and asks for them," said Elisa.

*Noah's program includes therapy sessions at home, in a pool and on horseback. **Today as he approaches his second birthday, Noah is able to walk again with the assistance of a walker.***

"Jenna has been amazing. She saw progress in Noah before I could see it," said Elisa. "They are giving us the tools we need as parents to set up a therapeutic play area at home and to support Noah in getting stronger.

Because Noah's illness is rare, they took him to see a leading authority in the field at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. They were relieved to hear that the intense physical therapy they are providing for Noah through the Northeast Arc is in fact the best treatment for him. With continued intensive physical therapy, he will walk.

"A great weight lifted off our shoulders. He is going to dance at his wedding," said Mitch.



Over Christmas, NECN ran a story about the good news. As a result, the Holts have heard from families around the globe whose children are facing the same rare condition.

“Not everyone is fortunate enough to have a Northeast Arc,” says Elisa.

While Noah’s condition is rare, the experience of having your expectations for your child change in the blink of an eye is not. And so, Mitch and Elisa are volunteering their time to serve as Beverly Community Captains for Northeast Arc’s Annual Fund Drive, raising awareness of and support for NeArc’s transformational services for local families.

To learn more about Northeast Arc’s Early Intervention services, return to the [EI page](#) or contact [Martha Levine](#) at 978-921-1182.

To learn more about Northeast Arc’s Annual Fund Drive, contact [Susan Ring Brown](#) at 978-624-2487.