



The International 22q11.2 Foundation Inc.

Hi, I'm Mark Abissi, founding chairperson of the 22q Foundation. I own a real estate appraisal company in Southeastern Pennsylvania. I want to wish the International 22q11.2 Foundation a Happy 15th Anniversary!

It is hard to believe that the Foundation is 15 years old. Our daughter, Giavanna, who was the reason for the foundation, was born in 1994 with four holes in her heart. She was listed as failure to thrive, but a diagnosis was not made until much later. She had several tests over her first three years of life. Thankfully, her heart healed and she did not have surgery. In 1998, we finally got a diagnosis, 22q11.2 Deletion Syndrome. This certainly was not on anyone's radar. Between 1998 and 2001, we had many appointments at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, which is how I met Donna McDonald McGinn. In October of 2001, approximately one-month after 9-11, I was on a plane to testify at a real estate matter in Florida. It was a nerve racking experience, with armed guards in the airport. My only thought was, "There must be more to life than this? What good can come out of the 9-11 events?" Well, I will tell you... the 22q Foundation came out of these events. The stress of this world event and the affect of a child with an unknown disability had taken its toll. I prayed that God would show me how He would use this devastating event for good. I started brainstorming ideas on the plane ride home that would be beneficial to my daughter and others with 22q. I had no idea what the foundation would look like, but I just knew it was the right thing to do.

When I returned home, I contacted Donna who put me in touch with like minded parents. The original meeting in 2002 was held at my house and there a foundation was born! I had absolutely no prior experience with even how to start a foundation. The group of people that came together had different skills that created the foundation. I am truly grateful to the group. They are remarkable people!

I have been asked to state one fact that people may not know about 22q11.2 deletion/duplication. I don't know any medical facts, but I can tell you that, Giavanna is the most determine person I know. In spite of her medical condition, in spite of her Autism, she has accomplished so much. To me, 22q deletion is not a disability... it is a gift.

Mark Abissi

Founding Chairperson/Parent