



Down syndrome advocate

BY ANDY PARAS
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Grace Beahm
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Diane Andrews is more than just the speech therapist for Claire Vail, 4, who has Down syndrome. According to Claire's father, Chad, Andrews helps his daughter in many ways. 'I think the world of her. She's an angel,' he said of Andrews.

It's no wonder Diane Andrews likes coaching both of her children's soccer teams. It involves two of her favorite things: children and the challenge of reaching goals.

"Coaching's fun, it's organized chaos," the 37-year-old Mount Pleasant woman said. "You have to yell loud, tell kids to turn around — that they're going the wrong way — and make sure kids have snacks. And you have to learn how to tie shoes quickly."

Andrews brings the same enthusiasm to her job as a speech pathologist and her role as a board member with the Down Syndrome Association of the Lowcountry (DSAL). Friends and

colleagues say it can be difficult telling which is the job and which is the labor of love.

As clinical manager of the Medical University of South Carolina's Department of Speech Language Pathology, Evelyn Trammell Institute, Andrews works with many of the community's children born with Down syndrome.

Chad Vail said Andrews is much more than simply his 4-year-old daughter Claire's speech therapist.

"She really advocates for us on so many levels," he said. "She doesn't look for credit. She's very modest. I just think the world of her. She's an angel."

Andrews is the only DSAL board member without a child with Down syndrome, but Vail said you wouldn't know it by the passion she has.

Last year, she helped organize the group's first Buddy Camp. The idea was for children with Down syndrome ages 3 to 6 to pair with a friend without Down syndrome for a week of activities.

"We never created a camp before, so we pulled together and within about two weeks we organized a camp," Andrews said. "In the first day, registration was full. It was magical, it really was.

"When you jump in with two feet and don't look back, it's amazing what kind of things can happen," she said.

If it weren't for that attitude, the Lowcountry might never have met Andrews. She and her husband, John, moved to Mount Pleasant 11 years ago without knowing a soul here.

She first became familiar with children with Down syndrome as a graduate student at Johns Hopkins University and quickly focused her family-ingrained belief in community service into the cause.

"I think what I learned most is to really appreciate everything a child can do, whether it be a first step or a first word," she said.

"Those moments are special for all children, but those moments are even more special for children with Down syndrome."

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