



SUCCESS STORY

DANIEL LEARNS TO SKI



Today, on the last day of the season at Stevens Pass, I met a boy named Daniel.

Daniel is 6 ½ years old, very active, about 4 ½ feet tall and has the most beautiful brown eyes. Daniel is the oldest of three boys in his family. He has a three year old brother, Shepherd, and a two year old brother, Blake. Daniel's mom and dad are Linda and Tom – and they introduced me to Daniel because they were hoping that Outdoors for All might be able to help teach Daniel how to ski. For you see, Daniel has a lot of challenges in his life.

Daniel was born with a very rare chromosome disorder. It affects his cognition and overall development and leaves him with a number of lifelong challenges and developmental delays. Daniel doesn't talk. He can make sounds but he doesn't form words now. He understands you when you talk with him but you don't really know if you're getting through to him. Some might think that he has a form of autism, since his disability presents itself in similar ways to someone who has autism. But his disability is different.

Due to medication that Daniel's currently on, his eyes are very sensitive to the sun and it was an incredibly bright blue sky day at Stevens Pass. Even though his eyes were bothering him due to the sunshine, and even with his mom Linda's help, we had a very difficult time getting him to wear sunglasses or goggles. He kept wanting to pull the eye protection off his head. Daniel doesn't focus very well. He can't currently express himself very well – or at least not in ways, yet, that I could comprehend.

But even with all of these challenges, there is so much that Daniel can do! And of course, that's why I was there as an instructor to meet him and discover how we could help him be successful with skiing.

I quickly learned that with his skis on, Daniel could slide his feet and skis. With guidance, he could scoot first one leg, then the other on the snow. With assistance from his mom, Linda, we each took one of his hands and determined that Daniel could hold his balance mostly on his own and we could guide him along the snow. Daniel and I then explored pulling and pushing him along the snow around the base area of Stevens Pass and he was able to maintain his balance with just a little help from me. And, we took plenty of breaks because Daniel needed them – and especially because Daniel really liked to eat the plentiful snow (smile – what 6 year old doesn't?!)

Today, I worked with Daniel in very short moments of instruction and plenty of "change up" to help him have fun, learn and stay somewhat focused on the morning. He was able to work on different tasks in very short bursts of time – perhaps 15 to 20 seconds, and sometimes longer. We kept exploring, taking breaks, eating some more snow, pulling and gliding along in the snow and then after about an hour, we were ready to make a run on the Stevens Pass magic carpet surface lift.

Today, I wasn't sure if Daniel was having fun. Was I getting through to him verbally? Not so far as I could tell – and that was challenging for me. Was he enjoying himself? It was hard to tell. But then an hour and a half or so into the lesson, after recharging from a little snack break from his mom, she asked him "Daniel, do you want to go ski (some more) with Ed?"

And Daniel reached out, on his own, to take my hand.

And today... Daniel just about melted my heart.

We then headed for a final lap up the magic carpet at Stevens Pass. Daniel was under my arms, standing and maintaining his own balance with just a little bit of help from me, and he, of course, snagged another bite of snow for the ride up the surface lift. We got off the conveyor and then skied a few assisted turns together so that Daniel could finish and receive a great big hug from his mom.

So tonight, as I write out my thoughts on Daniel, our day on the snow, what we each learned from each other, and how Daniel's whole family was able to have a fun morning on the snow at Stevens Pass – I know that I am so grateful for the many opportunities that I have in getting to be part of such an awesome Outdoors for All mission.

We get to regularly enrich the quality of life for children and adults with disabilities just like Daniel. We get to bring meaningful fun into their lives and the lives of their family members. Together, we're able to erase the doubts and fears of whether a particular outdoor recreational activity can be an option. We figure out ways to make things work. We help individuals like Daniel and his parents to achieve – and together, we're all the better for it.

So today, I met a boy named Daniel. And yes, as of today there are still many things that Daniel can't do – and perhaps may never be able to do. Yet today, Daniel showed that there was absolutely something that he can do. Daniel can learn to ski!