

A happy granny says thank you to BabyGym®

By Dr Melodie de Jager

At the annual BabyGym Babble Conference I shared our family's journey with our little Josua born on the 25th of January 2016. His mommy, Juané, had a wonderful natural birth and for the first four months we ooo-ed and aaa-ed because our blue-eyed boy was a heartbreaker from the moment he was born. No, it is not just the ouma's opinion! People often commented on how Josua had the uncanny ability to connect with you, both through a firm grasp and eye contact.

They live 350kms away hence we did not see each other often, on average once a month and yes, his head circumference was bigger than most, but there was no cause for concern. When we looked at video clips and photos we would think his head looked a bit awkward but... it may be the angle or the light. Until one day when my daughter Cozette was with Juané and Waldo and realised Josua was battling to keep his head up. A rapid race to see him in person ended with a dash to the doctor, scans and an emergency appointment to see the neurologist, thanks to a receptionist who followed her heart and not the procedures...

Three days later Josua was diagnosed with **Hydrocephalus** - also called **Water on the Brain**. **Hydrocephalus** is a condition in which there is an abnormal build-up of CSF (cerebrospinal fluid) in the cavities (ventricles) of the **brain**. The build-up is often caused by an obstruction which prevents proper **fluid** drainage. Our courageous little man had surgery 4 days later and went straight to ICU.

Waldo and Juané were absolutely amazing with their around the clock loving touch and Juané's smell on Josua's cocooning blankets. We prayed, hoped and watched. His eyes were clear and his grip firm, so we were encouraged and waited for him to recover from the trauma. With little guidance from the doctors we



did not know what we could do and what we should refrain from doing. So mom, dad and Kailah (his 21 month old sister) loved and entertained Josua who was very happy to observe peacefully. At the beginning of September his head was still a bit unstable and as all physical development is led by head stability, it was time to do more, BUT we were careful because we didn't want to cause any undue pressure in the brain. Mom and dad were encouraged to do BabyGym with emphasis being on week 2, to encourage head control, and week 5, because Josua needed to play developmental catch-up and to roll...soon.

Kailah, joined Josua's 'stimulation classes' and spontaneously encouraged him to roll, or as she called it – to "DRAAI" (TURN)! And Josua did catch up! He was soon rolling from tummy onto his back and started sitting even though a bit wobbly.

From observing Josua we could see his awareness of his arms was low, as he would easily topple over without any self-protecting response from the hands. We also noticed he was so used to turning his eyes instead of his heavy head, and that we needed to encourage a lot of head movement now that his head was a bit lighter. Turning his head to the left and to the right was fine, but looking up was very difficult. He would look up, activate the Tonic Labyrinth Reflex (TLR) and topple over backwards.

We were happy about the TLR reflex because it showed he was progressing! BUT, we also wanted the TLR to build its pathway and go to rest so Josua's posture would stabilise. So we did a lot of hand and arm massage to prompt the self-protective response and

the ribbon glove was very helpful to encourage Josua to move his head to look up.

And then an angel arrived - Rosina, a wonderful lady from Botswana who came to give mom a hand with now 23 month old Kailah, 8 month old Josua and the house! And Ouma was happy because now she could train a friend of BabyGym!

Rosina was eager to learn and she had one goal – Josua had to crawl! Two weeks ago on a Friday Rosina qualified as a Friend of BabyGym and had learnt how to gently massage his ears, because they were very hard. (This hardness amplified sound so Josua startled very often). We started by 'stroking' his ears with a soft baby hair brush just to create a pleasant sensation and within a week Rosina could massage his ears without any tears!

To improve greater awareness and strength in **Josua's upper body** - Rosina followed the same regime three times a day for just 1 week and the results were astounding.

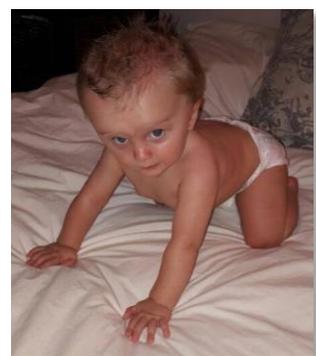
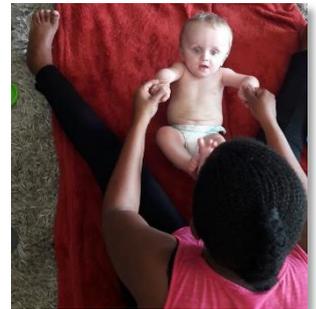
- Rosina massaged his hands and arms (mom massaged his whole body at bath time)
- did pull ups
- did pull-ups across the midline
- and encouraged tummy time more often.

To improve greater awareness and strength in **Josua's lower body** Rosina:

- Cycled the legs with his knees touching (when the legs moved)
- Let the left hand touch the right knee and s-t-r-e-t-c-h, let the right hand touch the left knee and s-t-r-e-t-c-h
- We recycled a low activity table from cousin Mila so Josua could stand on his knees (with his knees close together) and play to develop strong hips and legs, and greater awareness of his knees.

A mere 5 days later Juané sent us a photo of Josua standing on his hands and knees and ROCKING. The next day I was back in Limpopo for sister Kailah's second birthday and the change in Josua was remarkable to say the least! His interaction with his environment was amazing! His JOY at his newly found ability to be mobile was wonderful to see! He rolled spontaneously to the left and right and often rolled onto his tummy to reach for toys! He was sitting with ease and with a very straight back, even doing a 90 degree rotation of his upper body to reach for a toy or see his beautiful sister behind him! Standing on his knees was now second nature and he was no longer happy just watching – he would start complaining and then make plans to get to where he wanted to go – rolling or stretching.

While sitting he would start to lean forward, propped on one hand while his one leg would turn in readiness so he could get onto his knees! When he nearly lost his balance, his hands would shoot out to protect himself, and he was definitely much less sensitive to sudden or unfamiliar sounds.



Dad Waldo, mom Juané and sister Kailah were amazing – they cheered him on and did as much as possible. Rosina is an angel! She has a clear goal – she will receive a ‘crawling bonus’ if Josua crawls on or before 30 November.

What a win-win situation and all of it thanks to God’s Grace, a loving family and a nanny’s willingness and consistent hard work with BabyGym!

Early intervention? **I would always say YES PLEASE!**

