



## Cuddle Works



Cuddle Works was a labor of love by families of children with autism. Created in soft colors, the goal of these weighted sensory companions is to provide hugs and calmness. Cuddle Works has contacted therapy groups and lending libraries to make their weighted companions available to children and families. We're delighted to partner with Cuddle Works and know these "companions" will make a difference for Lekotek kids.

LEKOTEK  
*Brewfest*  
2025

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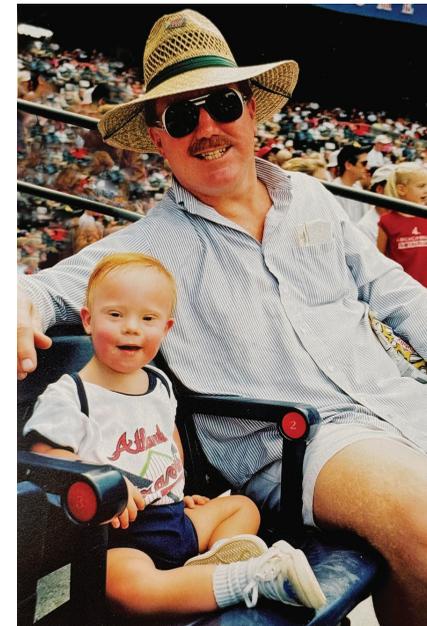
[www.lekotekga.org](http://www.lekotekga.org)

## Meet Ricky Raschke – One of Lekotek's Success Stories

Ricky Raschke is a Lekotek of Georgia success story. Ricky, who has Down syndrome, began his relationship with us in 2001. At 18 months, Ricky began play sessions and his family borrowed developmentally appropriate toys to facilitate learning. For the next two decades, with the guidance of Lekotek leader Lisa Nevitt, he would continue to enjoy Happy Tails pet therapy, Leko-music, summer camp, the annual Zoo Day, the Pumpkin Patch outing, fishing and rafting trips, and the Halloween and Holiday parties. "These great events, with Lisa's constant encouragement and unwavering enthusiasm for Ricky's success, were essential in his maturing into the multi-faceted young man he has become," says his mother, Linda.



Ricky became an Eagle Scout and attended Wheeler High School in Cobb County, where he played percussion in the marching band. He continued his education in the county's transition program and The Academy at Tommy Nobis Center, which offers vocational training. That led to his dream job.



Like his mother, Ricky has long been a passionate fan of baseball — and especially the Atlanta Braves. Linda claims that ball was his first spoken word. He continues to play Buddy Baseball at Sandy Springs Youth Sports where he started at the age of eight. "We went to Turner Field many times and in recent years attended games at the new Truist Park. He just loves his baseball," Linda says. So, it was a dream come true when Ricky was hired to be a gate greeter at Truist Park for the Braves' home games last season. He will continue to welcome fans to the stadium again next year.

Lekotek has played an integral role in contributing to Ricky's accomplishments, and inclusion in the workplace and community. According to his parents, Rick and Linda, Lekotek's unique approach to help all children develop cognitive, physical and social skills through play works. "We appreciate the support that Lekotek has provided our son in his journey."



## Lekotek Family Spotlight

Avery was born at a tiny but oh so mighty 2 lbs. 10 oz. She was full of sass and a fighting spirit from the moment she was born. She spent six weeks in the NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) where she grew enough to safely come home and begin her journey. She was diagnosed with an extremely rare chromosome abnormality with no name and no research.

Avery, who is now 10, has had to blaze her own path. She has spent her entire life in various therapies, followed by countless specialists, and she has won the hearts of many along the way. She has endured numerous hospitalizations and surgeries. No matter what life throws her, she is strong, she is fierce, and she is so full of joy. She is showing the world the love she's got to give.

When Avery began play sessions at Lekotek at two with "Miss Lisa", I was hopeful that it would provide opportunities to try new toys to engage her, enhance her development, and simply be a time to play that wasn't therapy. However, in the last eight years, Lekotek has become so much more to Avery and me. Lekotek is a home, a community full of love, and a cheerful place where it is evident that every child who comes through the doors is accepted. Lekotek has provided Avery with many opportunities to enjoy typical childhood experiences just like any child. The Lekotek leaders work tirelessly to make sure every child can participate and succeed. Avery has grown and learned so much from her Lekotek leaders who have poured their hearts into every play session. She has also enjoyed Sensory Playtimes, Egg Hunt, Pumpkin Patch, Therapy Dogs, Music Saturdays, and much more. Both of us are beyond blessed to be a part of the Lekotek family that has loved Avery for who she is, cheered her on, and most importantly, just let her be a kid.



Lekotek hour-long play/learning sessions use "state of the art" educational materials, computer and iPad technology to create accessible environments so every child can play and learn along the way. In addition to "including the child with disabilities into their family", part two of Lekotek's mission statement



is "to include the family into the community". That's why our events in the community are so important. Parents are often hesitant to participate in community activities, fearing their child will not have a positive experience. But our staff's adaptations and expertise make it possible for every child to experience success. Our community events make it possible for our families to enjoy all that Atlanta has to offer (just like any other family). Family activities include an annual Halloween Party and Holiday Party, Zoo Day, Pumpkin Patch Outing, attending professional sporting events, and rafting and fishing trips with the National Park Service. These photos were taken at the Atlanta Zoo, Holiday Party, and Get Air Trampoline Fun Day.



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