

Danielle's Law: "A Future of Caring and Sharing"

Danielle J. Gruskowski
December 6, 1969 – November 5, 2002

Danielle Jeniese Gruskowski, a life long resident of Carteret and the inspiration for Danielle's Law, was born December 6, 1969, to Diane and Doug Gruskowski. Danielle was a beautiful baby girl who was welcomed into this world by a family that was excited to have their first child and very first grandchild. Danielle had two younger brothers, Douglas and Derek. Difficulty came at an early age. Danielle was developmentally disabled, non-verbal, non-ambulatory and was diagnosed with Rett Syndrome, a neurological disorder seen primarily in females. Rett Syndrome causes a delay or regression in development, including speech, hand skills, and coordination.

Danielle needed total care and help with daily activities. Despite her disability, she led a full and active life as a member of her family and of the Carteret community. In 1972, Danielle was a founder of the Carteret Specials, a unique group dedicated to enriching the lives of local children with special needs. The group is still active today.

At age 28, Danielle moved to a group home in nearby Edison, in the hope that the greater independence of adult living would benefit her in positive ways. Instead, on November 5, 2002, Danielle died tragically and needlessly at the age of 32. Although Danielle had been running an extremely high fever all night and was having difficulty breathing, no one at the facility called 911 to get her the help she most desperately needed. By the time Danielle was driven to a doctor's office the next morning, it was too late to revive her.

On May 18, 2003, family, friends and legislators gathered at a Dedication Ceremony at the Carteret Library to honor the memory of Danielle. A plaque hangs on the wall of the library so that the legacy of Danielle lives on and she will continue to be an inspiration to others.

Danielle's Law (A3458/S2572) was signed on October 26, 2003 by Governor James E. McGreevey during a very moving ceremony in Carteret. The law requires staff members working directly with people with developmental disabilities or traumatic brain injury to call 911 in life-threatening emergencies. Had the requirements of Danielle's Law been in place in November 2002, her caregivers would have been required to call 911 and Danielle's death might have been prevented.

Many lives will be saved because of Danielle's Law. Families who have loved ones that are developmentally disabled, especially the voiceless and helpless like Danielle, are forever grateful. Our family was amazed how much you can learn about life from someone who said so little and who was so helpless. Maybe that's a lesson for us all.

My family and I felt privileged to have Danielle as part of our loving family and we are so very grateful that God entrusted one of his "own" very special angels to our care. We miss Danielle very much and she will remain in our hearts forever. We were certainly blessed by a little girl named Danielle Jeniese Gruskowski.



Diane Gruskowski (Danielle's Mom)