

Elsa's Story

It was just before Christmas, 12 years ago, that Elsa needed to go on medication to lower her eye pressures, as she had been diagnosed with childhood glaucoma, and had high eye pressures (31-33mmHg). It was an unbearable time for the Gathergood family as Elsa suffered extreme side effects from the medication – vomiting and refusal to eat or drink. As you can imagine, it was exceptionally hard for her Mum, Kellie, to see her baby girl so unwell.

Upon reflection Kellie had noticed that there were signs that something wasn't right. Every day without fail, when Elsa was younger strangers would comment, "Look at those big, blue eyes!". Elsa's parents had no idea that these big, beautiful, blue eyes were a sign of her glaucoma. Childhood glaucoma can cause the white layer of the eye (the sclera) to become stretched and thinner, making the eyes look bigger.

She was also very sensitive to light. Kellie remembers when other mums would put their babies on the lawn in the sun to play and how everyone enjoyed it, except Elsa, who would start crying. And when carrying her from inside to outside, she would immediately bury her head in her Mum's shoulder.

Kellie started to notice that 8-month old, Elsa was struggling with watery eyes. Following several visits to the GP, this was treated with saline solution, but the watery eyes persisted. Then a friend pointed out a grey film on one of Elsa's eyes. That was the point where motherly instinct kicked in with Kellie seeking a specialist's opinion.

Elsa had many visits to the operating theatre for testing, followed by some very distressing moments in recovery as she came around from the sedation drugs. It was a scary and uncertain time for her parents and definitely not how they pictured their first Christmas with Elsa.

In January of the next year the ophthalmologist performed a goniotomy, a surgery used to treat children with glaucoma, and to help lower the pressure in the eyes. It was done one eye at a time, one week apart and was a resounding success for Elsa as her eye pressure was reduced to 15 -17 mm Hg. Over the next six years Elsa went into theatre two to three times a year to check her eye pressure.

Every trip to the theatre was filled with trepidation because at each visit Elsa's parents signed a consent that if the eye pressure was too high, they would give permission for another Goniotomy to be performed. The Gathergood's are grateful that up to now Elsa has only needed the one surgical procedure for each eye.



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Elsa has suffered some damage to her optic nerve due to her elevated pressures, but so far this has not deteriorated in the 12 years since her surgery.

Elsa's eye pressure is tested every 6 months and at this stage she does not need eye drops. At some point the Goniotomy performed will stop working and her eye pressures will increase.

As Elsa rightly enjoys the innocence of childhood, "without a care in the world", Kellie is living with the constant anxiety and uncertainty of whether today is the day they'll be told that more surgery is necessary.

With your support, Kellie can be certain of one thing, that Glaucoma NZ will be there to help Elsa, Kellie and others like them, with information and support to enable her to continue to live her best life.

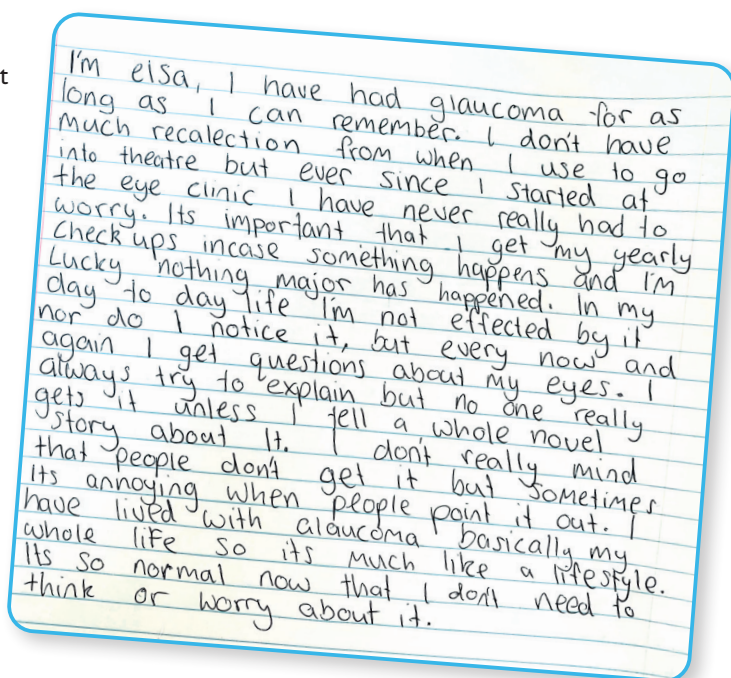
In these challenging times we need your support more than ever before to support families like the Gathergoods. Covid has added another layer of uncertainty to all our lives, demonstrating how such uncertainty can dampen our joy of life.

To enable us to keep our services free of charge, please do consider a gift this Christmas to support the vital work we do.

Kind regards



Pippa Martin
General Manager



I'm Elsa, I have had glaucoma for as long as I can remember. I don't have much recollection from when I use to go into theatre but ever since I started at the eye clinic I have never really had to worry. Its important that I get my yearly check ups incase something happens and I'm lucky nothing major has happened. In my day to day life I'm not effected by it nor do I notice it, but every now and again I get questions about my eyes. I always try to explain but no one really gets it unless I tell a whole novel story about it. I dont really mind that people dont get it but sometimes its annoying when people point it out. I have lived with glaucoma basically my whole life so its much like a lifestyle. Its so normal now that I dont need to think or worry about it.