



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Mom Laura Gennuso caresses son Luca, who was in day 2 of rehab in Toronto Tuesday. The near-drowning victim will need at least three or four weeks of daily therapy.

## Community rallies behind Stouffville boy, family

From page 1.

an MRI test result gave the couple something more definitive.

There was good and bad news.

Luca suffered severe damage to his brain's control centre due to the lack of oxygen. If he survived, he could eventually suffer from a poor quality of life and may end up deaf, blind or immobile. On the other hand, his cortex, the part of the brain that controls his memory, imagination and dreams, remained entirely intact, along with his heart, lungs, kidney and liver.

"It was an emotional rollercoaster. That's when you turn to God," Daniel said. "That's horrible and beautiful all at once. You've got the prognosis and it's bad, but, at the same time, it's about believing in something beyond doctors, it's about having hope."

It was not only a number of machines that were assisting Luca's life; he was also on medication to control his blood pressure and body temperature.

### MIRACLE OCCURRED

One sign his body continued to harbour unforeseen capabilities occurred when it began to recalibrate his body temperature, adopting lessons from the hospital's hot and cold blanket, which cooled him down when he was overheating and warmed him when he was cold.

During the next two weeks, each of the six machines he was hooked up to began to disappear, one-by-one, and doctors were finally ready to take Luca off life support.

Only one hour into the attempt, though, a tube had to be reinserted into Luca's nose as his body grew spastic, closing up his airway. The one week before doctors made a second

attempt gave the family time to prepare for the worst.

"We took fingerprints and moulds of his hands as keepsakes. I rolled a bed into ICU so I could sleep with him," Laura said.

But the second attempt was successful and Luca's breathing remained constant.

However, without the ability to do much to help Luca's condition further, the family was sent to Toronto's Emily's House, a palliative care facility — for end-of-life care.

"We all knew why he was going there, we just wanted to spend time together, as a family," Laura said.

It was here that something staggering occurred.

Luca, the boy who spent most of his days sleeping and still couldn't muster enough energy to swallow, coughed.

Although it may not seem like much, that minuscule reaction was the first sign he might pull through.

Soon after, he even managed to swallow, another vital bodily function he hadn't been able to perform until then.

To support his newfound independence the Gennusos put Luca back on formula and slowly reduced his medication and prepared him to return home.

"He was thriving, he really was," Laura said. "(His cough) just came back and the stronger he got, the more he coughed. They thought he was blind, but without the medication, he even began looking, focusing and tracking."

Then, in mid-July, for the first times since the incident, Luca began crying, or better yet, as his dad points out, whimpering, something he spends much of the day now doing.

"I distinctly remember in the hospital when I couldn't wait for him to cry, that's all

I wanted to hear out of him," Laura said. "I remember that night so clearly. So now I just embrace it. We feel like every little thing he does is a blessing. We get so excited about a sneeze, a yawn, a cry."

Laura's biggest lesson has been finally realizing how great life was before.

"All the complaints we have about the little things in our lives, it's just taking life for granted," she said. "I think back and say, 'We weren't perfect, but we were pretty close.'"

Despite this, she denies wanting that life back, insisting she now truly knows what she has.

*"All the complaints we have about the little things in our lives, it's just taking life for granted. I think back and say, 'We weren't perfect, but we were pretty close.'"*

For Daniel, who proudly scrolls through photographs of "charismatic" Luca modeling on the cover of Today's Parent before the accident, his current ordeal is all about staying positive.

"He still has lots of life, you can see it in his eyes," Daniel said. "He is going to show us what he wants and we're going to be there every little step of the way. We don't look at the past, we embrace the future."

Since Luca's arrival home, both parents spend almost every waking minute taking care of him, endlessly getting him to a multitude of therapy sessions, from hyperbaric oxygen sessions to conductive therapy class and experimental exercises called Cuevas

Medek, where Luca's body is swung around by a trained practitioner in hopes of regaining some sensation.

The ordeal has taken its toll on the family which has roots in Markham and Vaughan. Laura was forced to shut her burgeoning beauty salon and Daniel has been on leave from his job at IBM since the accident.

### WEEKEND FUNDRAISER

Nevertheless, the family, which also includes nine-year-old Sabrina and six-year-old Liliana, remains strong.

"Life could have been so much worse, we might not have Luca here today," Laura said. "You feel broken, but you also feel truly blessed. It would be worse if he wasn't here."

The most amazing detail for Daniel throughout this whole ordeal has been the community response, which has already helped raise \$63,000 for the family's plight.

Almost as if aware of all those pulling for him, Luca has been responding in kind. His physiotherapist, Nikolay Niagolov, described the way he squeezed his hand Tuesday as the "hardest yet" and explained to Laura and Daniel that he's now rolling his head to follow his body when he is turned over.

In stark contrast to his body, it's the deep emotion that he can see in Luca's eyes that keeps Daniel looking forward to a brighter day.

To help fundraise for future treatments, something that could cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, a children's fair and fundraiser is being held Sunday from noon to 5 p.m. at Altmann Country Market, 11703 Hwy. 48, just north of 19th Avenue.

For more information, visit [lucaswilltolive.com](http://lucaswilltolive.com) or visit the Luca Gennuso Donation Page on Facebook.