

Little Dylan Loden of Austin, Texas probably doesn't realize how his photogenic baby face is making a big impact in raising awareness for mosaic Down syndrome.

And the delightful four-year-old seems to be gaining momentum as his image will garner national attention in Times Square Sept. 30 during the New York City Buddy Walk.

Twelve years ago, the National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) established the Buddy Walk to promote acceptance and inclusion of people with Down syndrome and to celebrate October, which is National Down Syndrome Awareness Month. This allows family, friends and supporters to gather together throughout the world to support one another and raise awareness for Down syndrome. Down syndrome currently affects 350,000 people in America and the NDSS says "That's 350,000 reasons to walk!" In 1999 NDSS decided to add to their awareness program by including a video of individuals with Down syndrome in Times Square in New York City. This is where young Dylan will meet the big screen.

Dylan was diagnosed with mosaic Down syndrome (MDS). Mosaic Down syndrome is a rare form of Down syndrome where a percentage of cells have the extra 21<sup>st</sup> chromosome that causes Down syndrome and the remaining cells are unaffected. According to research 2-3% of the Down syndrome community has mosaic Down syndrome. Dylan's parents are members of the International Mosaic Down Syndrome Association (IMDSA) and the Down Syndrome Association of Central Texas (DSACT).

Dylan's debut to stardom began when his mother, Cheryl Loden, sent her son's picture into the National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) after receiving an email from her local Down syndrome association last December. Her local association said the NDSS was conducting a national search of individuals with Down syndrome to include in its 20 minute Times Square video presentation to promote October as National Down Syndrome Awareness Month.

She forgot all about the NDSS photo submission and then received the news this past August that Dylan's photo was selected.

"We were very excited about the opportunity," Cheryl said.

According to the NDSS, thousands are expected to participate in this event to promote acceptance and inclusion of all people with Down syndrome.

"This is a huge step towards awareness for mosaic Down syndrome." said IMDSA President, Kristy Colvin. "Not many people know about this rare form of Down syndrome and we are very happy that NDSS took this step towards awareness for mosaic Down syndrome."

The video presentation will run on the Newscorp Astrovision by Panasonic which is located in the center of Times Square. The video will air twice starting at 10:30 a.m. EST. After the showing, participants will be bussed from Times Square to Central Park for the start of the NYC Buddy Walk.

Many celebrities are expected to participate in this national event including John C. McGinley (Dr. Cox) from the NBC TV show "Scrubs" who is the 2007 national Buddy Walk spokesperson. Chris Burke, from ABC's "Life Goes On" television show will lead the one-mile walk through the park. Post-Walk festivities include games, refreshments, and musical performances by LAZ D, a nationally known hip-hop/rap artist who has Down syndrome, among others.

"We are not going to be able to go to New York for the event but I wish we could," Cheryl said. "It is very expensive to go there," she added. Besides Cheryl and Dylan, the Loden family consists of husband, Lee, and daughter, Kayleigh, 3.

The video hasn't been the first time Dylan Loden's image has been captured in time.

He is featured in IMDSA's informational brochure. And from all appearances, it looks like Dylan's a rising star.

Recently, Dylan was selected for DSACT's 2008 "Share the Passion" calendar. Children from within the association were paired up with local celebrities who share the same interests.

"Dylan was paired up with two other children with Down syndrome and the 'Biscuit Brothers', Loden said. The "Biscuit Brothers" have a musical children's show on the local PBS station. "Dylan loves playing any musical instrument. He got his first drum at age one, and at age two he got a full drum set."

"I am very proud of Dylan!" Colvin said. "He is such an adorable little guy and this is a fantastic way to promote awareness of both Down syndrome and mosaic Down syndrome. We at IMDSA are pleased to know that DSACT included Dylan in their wonderful calendar."

There was a gala celebration and photography exhibition to launch the 2008 DSACT calendar on Sept. 8 where Dylan and sister Kayleigh got all dressed up for the event.

"They had a red carpet event...to unveil the calendar and Dylan was there with his suit on," Loden boasted. "The picture of Dylan, the other two children with DS and the 'Biscuit Brothers' actually made the cover of the calendar," she added.

One may be left wondering where Dylan will pop up next. Stay tuned.

