

One Family's Success with EI/ECSE

My name is Cassandra Trout from Springfield. I am here today because of my son Ben who has a very rare genetic disorder. Ben is now 6 but our family began working with early intervention when he was only two months old. Our service providers worked with us each year to identify his current needs which have always been significant, and ensure that we knew the best strategies and techniques to help meet those needs. His early intervention team was the foundation of our family's support system and had a profound impact on his development. He finally learned to walk when he was three and although he still can't speak he is responding to his name and interacting with us more.

We've all heard that the parent is the child's first and best teacher. Children learn so much by listening to us, and watching us and interacting with us. But think, what if your child can't hear you because he has hearing loss, isn't watching you because he's more interested in his hands than anything else, and doesn't even want to make eye contact with you let alone interact with you, what can you do? How do you teach this child? I began to lose hope.

Early intervention and early childhood special education help rebuild hope by giving families the tools they need to help their children succeed. Our specialists made a difference for Ben not because of the short amount of time they were able to spend with him, but because of what they taught my husband and me.

In Oregon, of the children with the most significant needs, Like Ben, less than 2% are actually receiving the service levels recommended by research and best practices. Many families receiving early intervention only have 1 hr every two weeks. Funding has not kept pace with new children being identified for services and service levels have decreased substantially. Our service levels decreased during our time in EI/ECSE.

Evidence shows that if we invest in children now when they are young, we save so much when they go to formal schooling. I am currently a special education teacher for kindergarten through 2nd grade and I work with these kids who haven't had enough early support, they are frustrated, confused and overwhelmed by our primary education system. My son is in Kindergarten now and is frequently overwhelmed because at six he still doesn't have a functional communication system in place. He still cannot communicate his needs or wants and doesn't understand even basic directions like follow me or wait. Our ECSE program was great but unfortunately he needed more.

Oregon has invested in EI/ECSE in order to change the lives of children and families like ours; we need to actually invest enough to be able to provide the service levels proven to be effective in making those changes!