

To Whom it May Concern:

At our son Jonathan's two year checkup, our pediatrician referred us to Early Intervention because Jonathan had not started talking yet. We had been waiting for that explosion of words to happen and it just wasn't happening. His behavior was starting to show how frustrated he was that he couldn't communicate with us. We started speech therapy through MESD a few months later. His speech therapist, Jenny, started with sign language because Jonathan's ability to make sounds was very limited. Jonathan had grown so frustrated with his limitations that he had begun to express himself with his body, since he was unable to express himself verbally. It was a daily struggle to try and understand what he wanted and needed, and meet his needs before his frustration grew beyond his ability to control himself. His speech problem was rapidly becoming a behavior problem. Sign language was instrumental in helping him feel understood and helping us be able to understand him. His weekly appointments with his speech therapist were helpful for the whole family.

As time went by, he began to be able to make more sounds and start to say words and phrases. We were able to get to a place where we could understand most of what he was saying and he was satisfied with his ability to communicate. Once we were out of what felt like crisis mode, we were able to stay ahead of his struggles and are now in a place where he is happy and feels understood. He continues to receive services and his current speech therapist, Megan, has been a blessing to our family. She works with Jonathan on behavior and emotions as well as speech, and has given us many tools to help him as we go through this together.

Without question, early intervention services have helped Jonathan as well as our family and have significantly lessened the negative impact that his speech problem was having on his life. Having gone through this experience with Jonathan, it is easy to see how something minor like a speech problem can quickly become a behavior problem. And once a child is school age, a behavior problem can become a social and emotional problem in addition to having a negative impact on their learning. A minor disability without early intervention can have life long consequences. Even if a speech problem or other disability is addressed in the grade school years, the negative impact that the disability had in the toddler and preschool years could potentially stay with a child for the rest of their life. Investing in early intervention and early childhood special education will pay dividends in the lives of these children and the communities they live in.

Sincerely,

Shelly Koetje