

## One Concern, Two Paths through Early Intervention

### By Margarita Diaz

It all started with my oldest son. I was concerned that he wasn't reaching his milestones for developing language and communication especially in a bilingual household. He seemed to understand a lot but was not interested in imitating the sounds I or anyone else made. After expressing my concerns to his pediatrician, we agreed to refer him to early intervention. I didn't know if this was for me but I decided to go ahead with it. Through his evaluation, we saw that he was at a level where it wouldn't hurt to receive services but there wasn't a significant need for them either. I chose to continue. He started to meet with his Developmental Specialist (DS) weekly to work on his communication. What were my goals? Mainly for my son to be able to use words functionally. Our DS would come every week with her bag of toys and use it to teach him signs for words such as "more" and to follow her instructions. It was great to see him go from not being interested in engaging with her to being excited about what was in her bag. When he was old enough and was using sign language consistently, the DS suggested that attending an EI group would also support his development. At this time, we were working on saying the word along with the sign in an attempt to transition him into using words only. It wasn't until he attended his first group that he realized that he needed to say the words in order to get what he wanted. Being around other children and seeing what they were doing helped him make the connection. From that moment on, he took off! He started to use words to communicate and followed routines. By his next assessment, he had improved so much that he graduated well before his 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday!



A few weeks after my oldest started to attend the EI group, I had another baby boy. When he was 2 years old I had the same concern about his language development. His pediatrician encouraged me to refer him to EI. When he began services, things were different. The service plan was different. Where I had trouble identifying goals for my oldest this time it was simpler. I wanted him to be able to let his brother know that he wanted to play or that it was his turn; to be able to communicate a few words and to feed himself. There was no bag of toys at the weekly visits. Both of my sons were in day care at this time and his specialist engaged with him using what was there and what was happening at the time, whether it was free play time or reading

time. This allowed his day care provider to also learn how to support his development by reinforcing the signs for “more” and “my turn” the rest of the week. During the home visits the specialist showed me ways to use his favorite toys and food to reinforce learning. Because my son’s 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday is in August and we were preparing for him to start school, his specialist explained the process for transitioning out of EI and whether he would need services after turning 3. We requested evaluations to be done by the Department of Special Education to see if my son would need additional support for when he started school. During this time, my son received a developmental assessment through which we learned that he was on the Autism spectrum and that he would need additional support after age 3. Using this information and the feedback from the other evaluations, we were able to get an IEP in place which helped him have a smooth transition from EI to school. If it weren’t for his specialist and his support, including attending the developmental assessment with me and visiting the school my son was going to, I wouldn’t have known that he needed this and now he has a great team supporting him. My son is a happy three year old who loves to sing and play with his older brother!