

# Eli's Success Story

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Eli started at STEP Head Start in August of 2015. This is his second, and last year at STEP and he has come a long way.

When he started over a year ago, he was speech delayed; so much so that, at almost 4 years old, he could barely speak more than a handful of words. He always did so well communicating to me what he needed that, even with my prompting and encouragement, he had no interest in learning how to communicate more effectively.

Eli's teachers noticed his delay. Naturally, because he could not understand what was asked of him a majority of the time, he could not follow most basic instructions that children his age could follow. His teacher administered a routine Brigance screening that all children must go through each year. The results of the screening confirmed that Eli was delayed in more areas than just speech. He was academically delayed due to the challenges he faced with communication. His teachers suggested that Eli go through evaluation for special education services to help him catch up in the areas he was behind.

This evaluation led to a long year of emotional roller coasters for me. As a mother, the last thing you want to hear from others is that your child is not a "normal" child. By no means was I told this. Everyone at STEP has been beyond helpful and encouraging through the entire process. I guess I just had to go through a mourning stage. I had to accept that there were problems, and then I had to set my mind on fixing them in the correct way so as to not overwhelm Eli. I had many moments when I wanted to back out of the evaluation just because I felt like my child was being held to standards that were unrealistic. In reality though, it was just tough to have my son be evaluated and to come to terms with all of the specific things he could NOT do. I had meetings with Eli's teachers, Head Start staff, and those involved in the evaluation directly. There were phone calls, tears, and many long nights pouring over paperwork. I cancelled the evaluation and started it back up. It was difficult for all of those involved, but anytime I seemed too stressed or overwhelmed, staff at STEP were right there with me and taking time out of their busy schedules to have meetings with me. They wanted me to be confident in the choices I made for my child and I couldn't be happier with their help. I tell them all the time, "I don't know what I would do without you!"

The evaluation was finished and we all met to discuss results and recommendations. We began speech services in February of 2016, but just by going to class regularly throughout the week, Eli had already improved in speech and understanding. The routine of following rules and regular class instructions helped him more than anything! He became more social, he played better with children, and he learned many new words just by the social interaction he received at STEP Head Start with the other children.

Eli was put in private speech therapy over the summer and he took off! He had already begun to improve, but something in his therapy made all our other activities/exercises just click! He began to enjoy learning. We had MANY play dates over the summer and even used technology to help keep him

interested in conversation practice. (For example, while playing Xbox, he would ask for help and I would use conversation to guide him through it instead of just doing it for him. He understood basic words like "jump" and "run" and even learned letters of the alphabet by the names of the characters on the screen.) I continued to study on my own, talk to friends and family about his progress, and prayed a lot!

Eli Began this school year with a bang! Instead of being transferred to another school as discussed, we decided that he should stay at STEP because he improved so much in such a short time. We were blessed to have the option to be at STEP for one more year and keep him in his routine with his same teachers as the year before. Eli went from starting the previous year barely speaking and now, I am so happy to say, Eli has full conversations! He knows all of his ABC's and many of their sounds! He counts beyond 20! He writes his name and draws recognizable figures and pictures freely! He went from a very immature fist grip to an age appropriate pencil grip! He's formed friendships, follows instructions with 2 and 3 step commands, and is one of the most well-mannered children you will ever meet. Eli's recipe for success was an hour of homework every day. This involved going over ABC's, counting, writing, completing worksheets from school, and flash cards provided by his teachers, and reading a book or more every day. I may be biased, but he is simply a joy! He always has been, but now we can talk and learn more every day because of STEP and their staff.

Eli's teachers, Mrs. Quinn and Mrs. Domica, have played the biggest role in his improvement aside from the work we have personally put in at home. His teachers took comfort in knowing they could communicate their concerns with me honestly; without fear of backlash. We have had many talks and they have helped me tremendously in bridging the gap of the unknown. The hardest thing we struggled with was trying to understand where Eli's disconnect really was. Was it just speech delay and that caused his other delays? Was it behavioral issues? Did he just not understand, or was he not WANTING to listen? This is especially hard for them because they don't know him like I do. If it were not for Eli's incredible teachers, I don't think he would be where he is today. They took me aside and shared concerns of behavior, gave tips on activities to do to strengthen his hands, provided links to websites for further resources, and were always there to talk to. I applaud them for their sacrifices, creativity, and patience in teaching our children every day. They do a fantastic job and they are most definitely making a difference.

STEP Head Start's mission statement is as follows:

"STEP, and its partners, facilitate Solutions That Empower People to overcome their barriers to economic, educational, and developmental success within the communities we serve."

This statement is true! This is exactly what they have done for our family. I am grateful for the kick start they have given my son academically and socially. They have been supportive and helpful for me as well. If it were not for their help and their experienced staff, I would have been lost. I have learned much through almost 2 years, and I feel confident and prepared for Eli's entire educational career. Thank you STEP Head Start and Early Head Start! You are very loved and appreciated and our success is because of YOU!