

## Will's Story

I was recently asked by Autism Partnership to provide honest feedback about a program they provide to my son, Will, called ***Jump Start***.

Below is our story.

In May, 2007, our son Will was diagnosed with autism. My husband and I actually noticed some of the signs even earlier but since Will was such a happy little guy, we didn't talk to a pediatrician about Will's behavior until he was 18 months old. It's at that time I mentioned to our doctor that Will didn't respond to his name, he didn't speak and didn't point to any objects. Fortunately, our doctor immediately gave us a referral to get Will diagnosed.

We live in the state of Alaska. Unfortunately, our state does not have a lot of resources available to provide services to children with autism. However, we have a very strong network of friends, and as soon as I shared the news about Will, our friends recommended we get in touch with Autism Partnership.

Please understand that I am a cynic by nature and, being a physician by profession, I certainly didn't want to take a referral at face value. I was willing to try Autism Partnership's methodology: Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). However, I wasn't necessarily convinced that it was the only treatment that would work. My plan was to take Will to Autism Partnership for a week long intensive training called ***Jump Start*** and see how well he did. We did ***Jump Start*** six weeks after Will was diagnosed. When I say this was a life changing event for everyone, I truly mean it.

The first ***Jump Start*** training that Will received was in July 2007. I attended, as well as our support staff, Sandy, who had been working with Will conducting ABA for a little while. My husband stayed at home to watch our daughter, Johanna. I was impressed the very first day I was at Autism Partnership. The staff were some of the most amazing and talented people I had ever met. Granted, my exposure to ABA was limited at this time; but, Autism Partnership staff made it look so natural and seamless, almost as if they were just playing different games and activities with Will. Of course I later found out that every step an Autism Partnership staff made was intentional and had purpose..... it just looked effortless. When Will came to Autism Partnership he was nonverbal. By the end of the first ***Jump Start*** week, people in other cities could hear the screams of joy coming from Autism Partnership as Will said the word "ball!!" To go from nonverbal to verbal in one week brought tears to my eyes.

When I arrived home, my husband couldn't peel me off the ceiling. I couldn't wait to schedule our next ***Jump Start***. And, as much as my husband balked at the bill, he couldn't help but notice some of the differences in Will and, more importantly, how truly inspired and motivated I was to continue what I had learned and follow his treatment plan that was developed over the week by AP. It was worth every penny.

Since that first visit to Autism Partnership in July of 2007, not only do we try and do at least 3-4 ***Jump Starts*** per year, but now my husband and daughter come along and we all learn useful tools to help keep Will's program on track.

Will is now 4 years old and attends pre-school with an aide. He speaks in full sentences, has labels for everything, and understands what we say. He is an extremely smart child. This means we are constantly kept on our toes when it comes to working with his behavioral challenges.

What's great about ***Jump Start*** is that we achieve different goals at each training. The sessions are flexible because, like any child, Will goes through different stages. I can honestly say that every time we attend a ***Jump Start***, Will makes amazing progress.

There are so many aspects that make Autism Partnership the best agency for autism treatment. The employees are extremely dedicated to their kids and they've been trained by the best in the field, which is evident in the progress the children make. I have since done my homework and researched other treatments from horse therapy to Floor time. What I found is that ABA is the only treatment that is truly effective, and even better, Will really enjoys it. You should see the pride on his face when the Jump Start staff expertly teach him skills that previously eluded and vexed him.

We continue to visit Autism Partnership and participate in ***Jump Start*** on a quarterly basis. We are fortunate enough to have staff from AP consult to us in Alaska to ensure that Will's program goals are being met and that we, as parents, are every bit involved in the process.

We cannot thank Autism Partnership enough for making such an incredible difference in our lives and giving Will the chance to live the best possible life he can.

Sincerely,

Jane Heisel, M.D.,M.S.