



Double Trouble: Olivia and Samantha A Family's Story

After nine years, my son, Connor, finally got his most desired wish: a sibling. In this case, he got two—twin sisters. Olivia and Samantha were born healthy at 38 weeks and came home with us after only two days in the hospital. And just like that, our three-person family blossomed into a five-person family.

Early on they seemed perfectly typical. Sure, they were a little tough to handle but aren't all twins? At around 14 months they hadn't begun walking yet and I was concerned. I began to question their pediatrician and was reassured that nature takes its own time and each child develops at a different pace. Soon after, they began walking and I thought I had worried for nothing. At almost two years old when they weren't speaking yet, I was again reassured that nature takes its time and I should not worry. By the time they were two and a half I began searching for a neurologist to look into the girls' lack of speech. By three and a half years old, the girls were enrolled in a program for special needs but still had no firm diagnosis of any disorders; no one would confirm or deny autism. I feared the word "autism" like one might fear the word "cancer." I shuddered and cried at the very mention of it.

Finally, and at long last, one day before they turned four and on their big brother's 13th birthday, both girls were officially diagnosed by the Center for Autism with PDD-NOS [Pervasive Developmental Disorder—Not

Otherwise Specified; a disorder on the autism spectrum] and they were considered severe. Though this wasn't a total shock, the reality hit hard, especially the "severe" diagnosis. I had hoped and prayed we would almost be laughed out of the Center for wasting their time with our perfectly typically-developing children. That didn't happen.

I may not have gotten my wish, but I received a powerful gift all the same. I finally knew what my children were dealing with and now had the Center for Autism to guide me and find a way to help my little girls. We began with Outpatient Therapy once a week at the Center and I saw something begin to change. In September of that same



year my girls began attending the Center's full-time Pre-K Program.

The change since then has been remarkable. Prior to attending the Center, my daughters never communicated with me in any way, shape or form. What to eat, what toys to play with, what cartoons to put on television—it was all guesswork until the Center came into our lives.

Today, Olivia and Samantha point and speak to express what they desire. When little Olivia first said, "peanut butter" to me one day while pointing to the cabinet, I nearly fainted. She had never expressed a desire before, ever. The ripple effect of their ability to communicate has been tremendous.

No longer do they climb in order to reach a desired item, now they point or lead me to the item to retrieve it for them. No longer do I assume what they want to eat or the clothes they wish to wear, they tell me. To know what is in the mind of my children and not to simply guess is a joy that I can barely describe to those who haven't had to work for it.

Maybe the biggest change has been inside of me. I came to the Center a broken, scared, decimated person. I had trouble thinking clearly and I couldn't stop crying. I was completely without hope

and felt helpless. It certainly didn't happen overnight, but day-by-day and with a lot of help from the people at the Center, I began to change. I realized it wasn't the end of the world, my daughters' lives weren't doomed forever, and I could make a difference. My little girls' futures are wide open and their potential is limitless.



I began this journey by not being able to even say the word "autism" without breaking down. Now, I'm a strong warrior who is ready to battle for every opportunity that will help them progress.

This simply wouldn't be true without the Center for Autism in our lives. They supported me, listened to me cry, listened to me beg God for this not to be true. They never judged me, never made me feel weak, and only gently guided me down the road to understanding and solutions. To say that our family was put first is an understatement. Everything

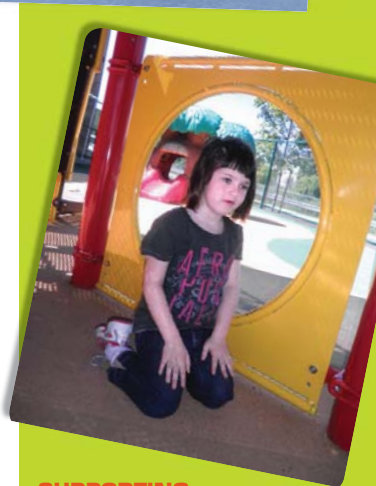
was done at our convenience with little regard for their own schedules. I was never pushed or made to feel guilty as though I wasn't doing enough. When I was ready to try something new that would help the girls advance their communication or skills, they were right there to support me and show us the way. I received so much emotional support from my Family Consultants that at times I felt they should be charging me for care. It took a lot of picking me up before I could stand up on my own for my girls. And as if I was the only person in the world they had to worry about, they made time to pick me up over and over again.

The Center for Autism brought order where there was chaos, hope where there was despair, understanding where there was confusion, and strength where there was weakness. I will be forever grateful.

—Kathleen Connolly

WHAT OUR FAMILIES SAY

- “You have helped my child communicate with me... it is wonderful after so many years of silence.”
- “I saw a difference in my son's behavior and communication skills within a month of receiving services.”
- “My child is beginning to slowly eat his favorite foods again. I am very proud of him, and grateful for the Center for Autism.”
- “You focus on the child's needs first, and get the family to follow.”
- “I feel very grateful and pleased to have found such a unique program for my daughter.”
- “My daughter and I are now able to have conversations. She's behaving like a typical 4 year old, and that exceeds my wildest dreams for her.”
- “My child has made progress with impulse control, language skills and communication each year that she has been in the program. Thank you.”



SUPPORTING THE CENTER

Donations are a valuable resource to the Center, and your investment in our programs and services will guarantee our future success. We are grateful to all who include us in their philanthropic vision, and encourage you to consider a gift today!

For more information on how to make a donation to the Center, please visit www.thecenterforautism.org/support.