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CPD Legacy Story: Becca Crookston

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This CPD Legacy Story is written by Becca Crookston whose two daughters have been involved with the Up to 3 Early Intervention program at the CPD.

Part-time Therapist, Full-time Mom

By Becca Crookston

As a mother of children that need extra help, I am busy. I love the Up to 3 Program. It helps me solve the current problems I deal with everyday. But, it also adds to my busyness. They have also helped me find other services in the community for my children to benefit from, such as great interactive story times, and Signing Time products, and even a Rachel Coleman concert. These events also add to the busy in my life, but it is worth it. I am busy for my children. I am busy because I'm a mom.

My husband and I have four children and they, of course, all have different needs. All of them have been in speech therapy.

I have elementary-aged boys. I volunteer in their classes at school and serve on the PTA board, so I can ensure they know I care about them and their education. They know they can tell me so-and-so did such-and-such and that I know the personalities in their classes, so I believe them and can help them brainstorm a solution to the problem if needed. They talk to me about things that are concerning them more than they would if I wasn’t in the classroom. (I know because I spent half a year not volunteering in the classroom.)

Speaking of talking to me...that within itself is a major milestone for my autistic son. We lived out-of-state when we were doing early intervention with him, so we didn't get to use Up to 3, but at least we did have help. Now that I’m familiar with the classes offered here, I wish we had been here. He could have benefited from the Leap Frogs class (Let’s Eat And Play). New food has always been a challenge for him. It's not like we were trying to make him eat crazy stuff either, just “normal” things like eating a cookie without eating around the chocolate chips, or putting milk on the cereal, or eating grapes without peeling them, or eating a strawberry with the seeds and all. He has made great progress and I am extremely proud of him, however we are not out of the woods yet.

Last year my second son was in a speech program at his elementary school. One day when he was sick, I went to get his homework. His speech teacher wanted him to work on a certain sound, but when she pulled open her file with that letter, she realized she was out of the pages with the words she wanted him to work on. I explained that I could pull words out of my file, and stick them in a game to have him practice. She was impressed, but I wasn't trying to impress. I was just being his mom.

We first learned about the Up to 3 program when my oldest daughter failed the hearing test at age 2. We were shocked as could be. We set an appointment for surgery and called around looking for a early intervention speech program. We got the initial testing done over the phone. Kathryn, our service coordinator, asked me questions about her speech and I said she has two sounds. She says “ma,” and “ba.” She made those two sounds stand for, mom, milk, more, bottle, ball, and bird, as well as anything else that she could get away with. She was in the program for one year, until she turned three. During that time we attended most of the classes offered, but her favorite class was Signing. She picked it up so fast. She knows more signs than I can count. She learned about 200 signs in a month. She had found her way to communicate. She would see it and start using it. I would study each word and try to figure out where to put my fingers, review the words, teach the words to my family, and keep a list of words we still needed to learn. When a college-age person saw that I was signing, she told me that she took a signing class and it was hard and asked how could I keep the signs straight? The difference between us, was she wanted a good grade and I wanted to communicate with my daughter. I did it because I’m a mom.

I’m sure we had a few too many potty training accidents that were my fault. When someone signs they need to go and you don’t look at them, because dinner is important, too, you end up having to put dinner on pause anyway. We still sign in our home, mostly out of habit. I don’t really realize I’m signing most of the time. Signing helps us clarify words. “Thirsty” and “fishy” sound the same when my daughter says
them, so to know if she wants crackers or a cup, we rely on sign. I have to really focus sometimes and realize how much signing we use. The times that she signs without vocalizing too, we know to have her ears checked. She is on her fourth set of ear tubes.

As we approached the time we were going to need to exit the Up to 3 program, many of the teachers told me we would be back. My second daughter was following the same pattern. We caught it earlier with her and she had her first (and so far, only) set of ear tubes placed at 16 months old. She will exit the program next month when she has her third birthday, but we know what to do at home and in the community because of the Up to 3 Program.

Sometimes attending different classes and hearing different approaches to behavior and speech was really frustrating. If one teacher tells me to require and push sounds, and the next teacher tells me to use picture cues, and the next teacher says to accompany a sign with each routine, it can be a little bit—well, really a lot—confusing. I have to remember that I am the mom and these ideas are suggestions. It is up to me and my husband to try them, and work them into our daily life, figure out what is working best, and know when to push a little harder.

As we have another birthday around the corner, I sometimes feel like we are being dropped from the system on the school district side. With our oldest daughter we went from ten hours of classes a week at Up to 3, to forty minutes a week at the school district! I know we have made wonderful progress and I don’t want to only focus on the things we still need to work on, but those needs do need to be addressed. I address the needs because I am the mom. When we transition to the school district and they don’t see the need to provide as many classes, I know we can find the help my children need by relying on the information I already have put into practice and made into habits.

The Up to 3 Program provides so much. It is easy to take it for granted. I wouldn’t be able to provide these services to my children or know what specific testing to request if I hadn’t been trained from Up to 3. Kathryn is frequently asking me about our whole family. She has given me ideas that work with all of my children.

Maybe some of the best advice I’ve received was a few months ago from one of the Speech and Language Pathologists, Stacy Sessions. She reminded me that sometimes a child needs to be a child and I need to be the mom. Maybe the days get too full of therapy. Maybe snuggles need to be given and the book needs to be read without any therapy requirements. Maybe sometimes the juice needs to be poured without requiring the articulation of the word be practiced. Maybe I should push her in the swing more than three times before stopping the swing and having her request more. All of the things we do for therapy daily are habits. We push and always require a little more. Do we really congratulate and enjoy the small advancements? I think we should also enjoy being a busy mom.

After all, I am a part-time therapist and a full-time mom.