

The Impact of Early Intervention: It's in the Tiny Moments – Debbie Smith's Story

I will never forget walking into the NICU room and seeing this tiny 4lb baby boy on a feeding tube, wrapped in a blanket and alone. To say I was overwhelmed was an understatement. How were my husband and I going to care for this baby? We fostered and adopted my son, who was born severely drug exposed and six weeks premature, which is quite rare. I did not know this was rare, but the nurses and doctors told me babies born this early don't normally experience withdrawal because certain parts of their brain haven't developed enough to go through withdrawals and even process the drugs. Because of this, he was entered into a case study to track his progress, which recently just ended at his 2-year well baby checkup. The results of this will eventually be published

because of the great progress my son James made. Even though he initially suffered from several developmental delays, now, at 2 ½, he is almost completely on target with his peers. Again, this is rare, but the impact of the Birth to Three program has helped him made tremendous gains.

My son was determined eligible for WV Birth to Three at two months of age. He had a large team - a speech therapist for feeding, a physical therapist, a developmental therapist, and

we later added an occupational therapist when he was 18 months old. These practitioners coached my husband and I, supported us and became a second family. When I saw a job opening to be an Interim Service Coordinator for Birth to Three, jumped on it. I fell in love with Birth to Three through my own personal experiences with my son, and with my education and previous job history, it was the perfect fit.



Here I am two years later, still loving Birth to Three, advocating for the program, and loving seeing my son thrive.



When I found out the case study was going to be published because of the great success he has made I made sure to let the doctor conducting the case study know that a large part of his success was due to the quality early intervention services he received. I will never forget when he signed “more” to me for more food. My heart burst. He told me what he wanted! James’ journey has involved celebrating many of those tiny moments that actually aren’t so tiny. It is those moments that have showed me exactly how beneficial his serves were. The staff I dealt with made sure I was involved, supported, and that I fully understood the Birth to Three process. Even when I felt overwhelmed, I was reassured.

I wish more families knew about the West Virginia Birth to Three program, that it’s free, that Birth to Three staff such as myself are here to help and support all families, and how impactful early intervention services can be. These services, coupled with a stable environment and supportive care can help ensure children can thrive, even the rare cases like my son, who is thriving and continues to beat the odds and overcome the consequences of Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS).

