



# MARI'S STORY

*“Mari loves to run and climb!” says her mother, Lisa, “even more so than her twin sister, Katie.” Shortly after their second birthday, a family member recommended that Lisa and her husband Matt call Birth to Three, but they were not immediately convinced of the need. Mari wasn’t talking, but Katie wasn’t talking much either. Mari did not make a lot of eye contact, but she had always demonstrated affection. Mari wasn’t responding when called, so they wondered about her hearing. After some anguished discussion, Lisa and Matt decided to call Birth to Three for an evaluation.*

*Mari was found eligible for early intervention due to a significant delay in communication skills soon thereafter. Her evaluation team also recommended an autism evaluation from First Partners, an autism-specific Birth to Three program. After meeting with Mari and completing a detailed evaluation, they told Lisa and Matt that Mari met the educational classification for autism. “It was devastating,” said Lisa, “but we started reading everything available on autism spectrum disorders”. Mari’s family learned that autism is much better understood today than in past years, and that the disorder is called a “spectrum” because it can vary from severe to mild across different children. Mari’s Birth to Three team began providing intensive early intervention services. Later, Lisa changed Mari’s diet to eliminate casein and gluten, having read that dietary intervention could possibly help and feeling like she must try everything to help her daughter.*

*Mari’s service coordinator, Patty, says that Mari is really making progress. “At first we worked on getting her to join us at the play table. It took awhile for Mari to get to know us, but now she comes right over, asks for ‘Up!’ and enjoys our visits. Mari works really hard and it is good to know that all the hard work is paying off and being noticed by others. Both of her grandmothers and her nanny are very involved during the day, and Matt and Lisa really make an effort to follow through on the team’s suggestions. They are a fantastic family to work with.”*

*“It is important to me that Mari play with her sister, so part of each visit is spent with them learning to interact and reciprocate during play”, says Lisa. Patty noted that Mari now takes her sister’s hand and leads her to a play tent where they play peek-a-boo, make eye contact, and giggle together.*

*Their local Cheshire school district has welcomed Mari to visit each Wednesday morning during an Open House free play session, and Patty works with Mari on her IFSP outcomes in the school playground. They have also provided photos of the classroom for a “transition book” that Mari can look at. This will help make the school setting familiar to Mari, and smooth the transition to preschool special education when she turns three later this year.*

*Matt and Lisa agree that Mari is making strides all the time due to the Birth to Three services and feel so thankful for all the support the program has provided – not only to Mari, but their entire family. “We know early intervention is critical to Mari’s success,” Lisa says. “Because of these services, Mari can now point to letters and recite the alphabet more or less. Every once in a while, she is also inclined to lean into me and give me a big, fat, juicy kiss. You can’t imagine how happy these things make me. Mari is very connected to the people she loves! She is very affectionate, and we fully expect her to speak one day. We are hopeful for her future.”*