

Grace Simpson

My 5 year old son was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder at age 2. A happy, loving, rambunctious, smart boy with an infectious laugh, Cash'an did not have any words. His ability to communicate and socialize was significantly impaired.

Cash'an did not know how to ask for what he wanted. Instead, without warning, he would pinch and bite out of frustration, when he could not be understood. While Cash'an's receptive language was about 80%, he needed to learn life skills, such as sitting at a table to eat, using the bathroom, and dressing.

At his public preschool, while other children played with blocks, Cashan was often sprawled out on the floor in the classroom. He was overwhelmed by all of the "information" in the room that he couldn't quite process, like the number of children, the noise, the lights. He couldn't comprehend instructions for what a teacher wanted him to do. He didn't know how to sit with other children or share a crayon. Instead of looking at a book, he'd sometimes bite the pages. Still, a typically developing little girl wanted to be Cash'an's friend. He had never spoken a word to her. At his first ever play date, Cash'an sat on one side of the room, never looking up at the girl, and instead played with the rug. Eventually, when no toy seemed to work, she got him interested in bouncing on a big ball. Laughing as he bounced, he didn't know how to tell her he liked playing, so instead, he bit her.

Since then, Cash'an was outplaced to a private school in Hartford that helps children learn through Applied Behavior Analysis, or ABA. The therapy breaks concepts down in small steps.

Tuition fees are so expensive, however, that we, along with many other parents, cannot afford it. School systems, with their limited budgets, are not eager to pay the fees regardless of how much it could help a child, like my son to navigate, learn about and contribute to his world. Evaluations that can provide diagnoses, and outline specific learning techniques needed also costs thousands of dollars.

Today, my son's ABA program has helped him learn how to answer to his name or respond a peer's "hello" with a wave. Through ABA, Cash'an has learned how to communicate with a picture system and other techniques. He has learned life skills - dressing himself, eating at a table, and using the bathroom on his own. With the help of an ABA therapist, he participates in some activities with other children.

And the little girl that he bit, has come over to play with Cash'an who, with the help of an ABA therapist, sits and paints with her. ABA has given Cash'an an opening to a world of potential. I implore you to give other children the same opportunity with support of Senate Bill 301.