It Was The first Time She Asked for Anything | CPD

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A tiny blond-haired girl slowly pedals a bicycle through the halls of the CPD, a teacher at her side. The pair stops at one of the many corners, and the teacher asks, “Which way?”

“That way, that way, that way!” says the girl, pointing.

What a difference a year makes.

When we first introduced you to **Sami Humphreys** last January, she had been diagnosed with autism and was receiving services through Up to 3. She did not speak. Sami and her mom, Heather, visited TechnoTots for advice on how to use an iPad for communication.

“TechnoTots is going to help us use it to try to develop expressive language, which she does not have,” Humphreys said at that time. “She doesn’t ask for help, she doesn’t try to pull anyone else in. Hopefully this way she can say I’m tired, I don’t feel good, I’m cold, I want to play.”

It was the beginning of a process.

Sami attended the Little Aggies preschool for three months, then the ABC preschool for three months, Humphreys said.

“That’s where we started to see some ABA-style behavior modification, at around (age) 21 months,” she said. “That’s when we heard the first talking at all.”

Sami transitioned to her local school district last March and attended preschool in Nibley through the summer. She also began receiving 15 hours of ABA (applied behavior analysis) therapy each week at home, thanks to the Utah Medicaid autism waiver.

“We got a beautiful call in August that we could come in and meet Dr. Higbee,” Humphreys said. Thomas Higbee is the director of the ASSERT (Autism Support Services: Education, Research and Training) preschool for children ages 3-5 who are on the autism spectrum. Getting Sami into ASSERT, Humphreys said, was “the massive goal.”

Sami, now 3, attends the preschool from 8 a.m. to noon, five days a week, and still receives ABA at home.

“With ASSERT, she’s turned into a chatterbox,” Humphreys said. “She now plays by herself, and about every third or fourth word is something you can recognize.

“After a month she said, ‘Mom, I want milk.’ It was the first time ever that she asked for anything, and the first time she called any of her family members by name.

“She’s so good. She is awesome. They (ASSERT) get all kinds of things out of her.”

Sami got to practice trick-or-treating for Halloween in October with the other children from ASSERT.

“She was the candy corn fairy,” Humphreys said. “That was awesome—for her to be able to go up to somebody she doesn’t know and ask for something is amazing, and she thinks it’s cool.”

And what about the iPad?

“We really were in TechnoTots to help her learn to use the augmentative device,” Humphreys said. “She will still turn it on every once in a while, and still mimics it when she doesn’t know a word for something. One day she turned it on so she could ask for a doughnut. There were no doughnuts in the house, so we got into the car and went to get doughnuts.

“It’s amazing—totally, totally amazing. She’s a whole different kiddo.”

Sami Humphreys practices "quiet hands" with her teacher in the ASSERT classroom.