

Early Start Family Stories Video Transcript – Episode 1

- We actually have two children who benefited from the Early Start Program. We have Oliver who is four, almost five and Hadley who just turned one. We lived in Huntington Beach for quite some time and that was where we planned to live and then we had Oliver and we found out that he was deaf at about two months old. When we first found out that Oliver was deaf, you know, we went through the Newborn Hearing Screen Program and you know, he "failed the test" is what they always say but it was kind of very flippant, like, "Oh, it happens, it's probably just water in his ear, don't worry about it", and so we tried not to worry about it and, you know, they said he was really moved a lot and they couldn't really get the headphones on him and everything. And so it was just that kind of medical perspective and then when two months later we finally got the confirmation that he was deaf. It was very, just the way it was presented to us was very doom and gloom and it wasn't until we really started talking to Early Start people that we felt like such a difference. If you wanna elaborate, we talked about that moment.

- Yeah, I mean, I think, you come out of the medical process and you feel sort of blue and overwhelmed and you have tons of questions about what the reality of the situation's gonna look like and for us at least we really started feeling better once we connected with Early Start and the education side. And, you know, people were very positive with respect to prognosis and outcomes, we actually met, you know, adult deaf people who had been through both mainstream programs and deaf aid programs and we started to feel a lot better about everything once Early Start entered our lives.

- Yeah, I mean, even at the beginning, just talking to the newborn hearing screening people when they asked us did Early Start connect with us and they were just so positive and they just talked us through it. I remember being on the phone with them for hours and just crying and they're saying, it's okay to cry, it's okay to mourn, you know, you had this idea of your child and their life and now that's different and just really letting us know that we weren't alone, I think that's, you know, one of the biggest takeaways from Early Start, is just having people come into your home, this place that, you know, feels a little bit un-homely all of a sudden and just say, "It's okay, we're here to help you." And I still remember the assessment team that came in and they were just so sweet with us and they brought a present for Oliver and they just were so warm. And it was just the kind of coldness and bleakness of the medical system, which we've, had the opportunity now, to connect with a really fantastic medical team. And, you know there are medical people out there that understand deafness and what they need and what our children need but in that beginning it was very, it was very, you know, binary.

- [Quimby] Yeah.

- And they were just so wonderful, And we started to... I remember we walked away from that assessment and we both kinda looked at each other and we're like-

- Feel much better.

- We feel a little bit better now And then our Early Start provider was actually a DHH, a Deaf and Hard of Hearing specialist who was fluent in sign language, she is hearing but she just absolutely loved the deaf community. She was engaged to a man that was deaf, she just really woke us up to the deaf community and encouraged us and she's the reason we went to the deaf school in the first place, 'cause she said, "Meet deaf people, become part of the community." And she was such a wonderful first contact and I hope everyone has such a positive impact when they first get introduced to Early Start.

- [Quimby] I think one of the cornerstone principles that Sam and I had as we were going through this process was we were open to anything that added to our, in this case, Oliver's life and our son's life and didn't detract from it so we were always saying, "If it adds, it's good if it subtracts, it's bad."

- Yeah, absolutely and we didn't really touch on it with Hadley because Oliver's deafness is actually related to a rare genetic condition called Usher Syndrome which is one in 50,000. and we had no idea that we were both carriers for that. And so, you know, when we started talking about having another child and going through that process of, well, what if she's deaf? What if she's not deaf? Like how does that affect their relationship? And that was really one of our biggest concerns was how would that affect Oliver? And, because we knew this genetic condition was possible, we actually found out Hadley was deaf when she was six months in the womb. And so, the first thing I said was, we had actually just finished Oliver's IEP meeting, and afterwards I asked for our LEA to stay on the call if she could, 'cause this was via Zoom. and I asked her and she was the first non-family member we told and said, "Hadley is gonna be deaf too." Like what can we do to activate our Early Start services so that we can just hit the ground running once she's born and she was so great about it, she's like, "Send me an email, get us going." And so Hadley, she had an IFSP before she was, I think she was just over a month old and had services the next week.

- So my name's Quimby Melton and I'm Samantha's husband.

- And I'm Samantha Hebermehl and I'm Quimby's wife and we have two children. We have Oliver, he actually has the same name with his dad so he's Oliver Quimby Melton, the Fifth. And then we have Hadley our little Hadley Rose Josephine Melton. And Oliver is almost five and Hadley just turned one and that's our family.

- [Narrator] If you are having concerns about your child's development or would like more information about California's Early Start Program, please call 1-800-515-BABY, that's 1-800-515-2229.