

# The Magic of a Child's First Words

Last year, I met Nancy\* and her four-year-old son, Eddie at City Park, here in Pueblo, while recruiting for HIPPY. I noticed Nancy pushing Eddie on the swings accompanied by shrieks and squeals of pure joy. I introduced the program and as we started talking, Nancy explained that Eddie was "non-verbal" and on the Autism spectrum, but that she was interested in being a part of the program. I reassured her that neither of those were a barrier to being part of the HIPPY program. We discussed how we'd be able to make accommodations and ensure the curriculum met Eddie's needs.

In only four months, it's clear that Eddie is growing and learning. It wasn't always easy. At first, our meetings together were a bit clumsy-- we had to learn how to incorporate Eddie's learning style and interests into the curriculum activities. Eddie is very interested in how things work. He once took out a screwdriver, and took apart the doorknob to see all its parts. We learned how to keep the core components of the HIPPY program in the activities, and tailor them to Eddie's learning abilities. By our 5th meeting together, he spoke his first words, and they were to me. As we finished our visit, Eddie came over to see the screen. He peeked across the screen, looked to my square on Zoom, and said "bye-bye!" while waving to me. I get goosebumps every time I tell the story. It's moments like that which are the most inspiring part of being a home visitor. It's magical.



Shortly thereafter, Nancy told me he had begun signing to communicate, things like "please," and "more." Just a few visits later, the signs changed to him saying the words. When it was time to fill out the biannual learning survey, I asked whether he was able to say 2 words together, such as "car go." His mom answered, "No, he can't." Only seconds later, Eddie walked over to his mom, tossed a bag of snacks on the sofa next to her and said, "More, please." Yet another goosebump inducing moment all due to HIPPY.

It is a joy to be a part of not only helping Nancy but getting to watch them blossom as a family. It has been an absolute pleasure witnessing his ability to communicate just flourish. I know this provides Nancy with a sense of hope for the future. She's been able to see Eddie learn and be successful with educational tasks, much like what he'll do in school. She's been assured that he will be ready for Kindergarten next year. Being a home visitor, I'm allowed into people's homes and lives and have been gifted the opportunity to witness moments of everyday magic.

Story shared by Bridget Young, a home visitor for Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY).

\*(names have been changed)