

Seth: Moving on to Kindergarten



You only have to spend a short time with the Harrises (not their real name) to see how special a family they are. Seth's relationship with his parents, Jeff and Tammy, is loving and playful, and their involvement in his success is unwavering. Seth, who turns six on December 23, started kindergarten in his hometown this year, but the road to get there was far from smooth. Because Seth's older brother Cole "did everything early," the Harrises noticed Seth's slower development when he was about three months old and became concerned. They weren't inclined to accept a doctor's view that Seth would catch up later.

It isn't easy to find and maintain consistent help for your child when you live in rural Washington County. The family lives in a tiny but pretty town in the northern part of the county. Its rolling fields and woods are located over an hour northeast of WCCP's home base, Machias. Over the past six years, Tammy and Jeff have traveled to Bangor, Lincoln, Baileyville, Calais, and Machias for Seth's medical and therapy appointments. And WCCP staff have traveled to Seth's home regularly for several years to provide therapy and case management services. Both parents and therapists have logged thousands of miles. But Seth has traveled a farther distance through growing up with seizures, surgeries, and a genetic condition, to the point where he can stand on his own two feet and attend public school with other children.

Seth was born with Isodicentric 15, a chromosomal abnormality that usually occurs as a random event during the formation of reproductive cells. Autism-type behaviors and language and other developmental delays are associated with idic(15). Seth also had a seizure disorder (now apparently inactive) and a hip dysplasia that required surgeries and body casts. It was frustrating for Seth and his parents that he was just beginning to crawl when he had to be sidelined by the casts and the need to heal.

After several years of speech, occupational, physical, and developmental therapies, Seth's team began in the fall of 2006 with sessions to determine Seth's needs and how the school could try to meet them. Seth's special education teacher, Paul, and his kindergarten teacher, Margie, also came to WCCP to look at special equipment and observe how our therapy spaces were set up. Seth's one-on-one aide, Angela, his aunt, was also hired in the spring of '07 to acquire skills from Seth's therapists here at WCCP. Angela now works with Seth at school along with Paul and they are finding that Seth is progressing enormously well, making gains beyond everyone's expectations. For a long time everyone thought that Seth would never communicate fluently and that he might need a special computer in order to do so. Seth is still learning to use the picture exchange communication system (PECS), but has also acquired a handful of words. Everyone is still hopeful that he will communicate through speech. He loves music and art. "He is sprouting," says Angela. "I thought I knew my nephew until this summer. Now he has more good days than bad." His frustration has decreased and his attention span has increased. "He's very social now. The kids love him," says Paul. "He's someone with the same opportunities as anybody else – he just had a different starting point." Of WCCP's role, he says, "You made a tremendous foundation . . . he's ready to make big gains."

Finding resources and support



Seth with his parents

Another WCCP service that the Harrises have accessed is Case Management. "I was never one to ask for help," says Tammy. Then she signed up for this service, which helps parents coordinate their child's care and their community inclusion, "and I wondered why I waited so long. It's the best thing I've ever done." WCCP Case Manager Joan Pulkkinen has helped arrange respite time for the Harrises, has helped them find funding for occupational therapy items and an appropriate tricycle for Seth, and is looking into a safety fence for their large yard. Joan is a key member of Seth's team and travels north regularly to meet with the Harrises and Seth's teachers.