

## ██████████ STORY

██████████ along with his twin sister ██████████ were born on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October 2009. After a non-complicated, full term pregnancy, both arrived thriving and healthy. Their older siblings, ██████████ (7 at the time) and ██████████ (4 at the time) were very excited to both have a new brother and sister.

Both reached their 12 month milestones at very similar times and continued to thrive. As we were heading to 18 month mark, there were subtle things we began to notice with regards to ██████████ communication, though most of it we put down to personality. He was much quieter than his twin sister ██████████ and a bit more reserved, and we were determined not to compare them. In all honesty, at the twins 2 yearly check with the health nurse, my concerns were still there but I didn't voice them.

██████████ at this point, did not have a huge vocabulary, and although I felt he engaged with his immediate family members, when it came to larger family gatherings he seemed to withdraw and found them overwhelming. If we were at our home during these times he would remove himself to a quieter area of the house, or on another occasion at his aunties house that didn't have anywhere else to go, he stayed in his dad's arms the whole time and clearly didn't enjoy it. In fact we ended up leaving early.

Not long after this, I started researching language delay and also looked at the autism spectrum which was terrifying, so we made the decision to take ██████████ to our GP for his opinion (██████████ was around 2.5 years old). Our GP then referred ██████████ on to a paediatrician (Dr Anne O'Neil) and also for a hearing test.

**This time was a very stressful time, anticipating the outcome of these appointments and hoping that our little boy was going to be okay.**

**Thankfully, during our appointment with Dr O'Neil, she was very clear in her opinion that [REDACTED] was not on the autism spectrum, and with a pass in his hearing test, she suggested we have him assessed by a speech pathologist. She gave us the contact details for the Frankston Hospital Speech Pathology Department, and also advised that there was a lengthy waiting list.**

**We immediately contacted the Frankston Hospital Speech Pathology Department to get [REDACTED] on the waiting list.**

**In the meantime and on further discussions with our GP he suggested a private speech pathologist in order to get things underway for [REDACTED] and so we attended with a local speech pathologist and her assessment of [REDACTED] was that he had:**

- Severe articulation difficulties**
- Significant expressive language delay**

**We continued with the speech pathologist on a weekly basis for a number of months, but we eventually discontinued for a few reasons. Her program didn't really seem to be benefitting [REDACTED] and they didn't seem to connect well and he didn't like going there. There was also quite a large financial burden for private therapy which didn't seem to be right for him.**

**We also joined a play group in order to further socialise [REDACTED] and although he initially found it daunting, after a few months he very much enjoyed attending.**

Luckily for [REDACTED] not long after this (around 3 years) [REDACTED] was offered an assessment and eventual group position (5 week program) at the Frankston Hospital Speech Pathology Department.

Coincidentally, just prior to this, we started noticing a great improvement in [REDACTED] socialisation skills to the point where he would be excited to have large family gatherings and run to the door to greet people, sit and interact and overall seem much happier in the social setting.

Our first group session was a very positive step for [REDACTED] he thoroughly enjoyed these sessions and both he and I learnt a lot from them and gave us a foundation to work on as a family unit. For the first time we all felt very positive for [REDACTED] potential.

Very shortly after we completed this group session we were introduced to [REDACTED] "one on one" speech pathologist, Catherine Sanchez. And it is really from here that [REDACTED] started to soar. Our weekly sessions to speech pathology were an exciting outing, and he will often ask me during the weeks when he could see Catherine.

We have been with Catherine now for nearly a year, and [REDACTED] has learnt so, so much from these sessions. From these sessions with Catherine (as well as a few other blocks of Group sessions), we have all learnt as a family how we can best help [REDACTED] develop his language skills further.

We are now armed with a huge amount of resources and knowledge that we can use in our home environment to help [REDACTED] in fun and inventive ways, thanks to the Frankston Hospital Speech Pathology.

Luckily for [REDACTED] although he has a language difficulty, he is not afraid to talk. We, in his immediate family are best at understanding him, though we have had a wide array of family and friends that have commented on the great leaps he has made with his language skills over the last 12-18 months.

[REDACTED] still has a long way to go, but with the help of Catherine and the staff at Frankston Hospital, we feel he has the best chance to reaching his full potential.

[REDACTED] has now just commenced kindergarten which has been a very exciting time. Although we have only just finished our first week, he seems to have settled in quite well, with no separation anxiety and has quite happily waved me off. He apparently does look to [REDACTED] whilst at kinder, but that is not of a huge concern.

We look forward to our continued support from the Frankston Hospital Speech Pathology Department. It is very hard to quantify in words the benefits they have provided [REDACTED] (and us as parents). I would not like not think where he would be without speech therapy, but we are very grateful for the ongoing support we have from both Catherine and the whole team.