Case Study – The Listening Program®

Aaron, Age 7, Autistic Spectrum Disorder

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Name: Aaron
Gender: Male
Chronological Age: 7 years
Clinical Diagnoses: Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Neurofibromatosis

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Aaron was diagnosed in late 1998 with autism and neurofibromatosis. He is an only child who rarely sees peers within his home environment. Aaron was spending the majority of his day lining up blocks and making patterns on the carpet. His parents reported that he was unable to communicate his needs and was not "functioning like he should at his age."

TREATMENT

I saw Aaron for the first time in August of 1999. I utilized the Hawaii Early Learning Profile to assess Aaron, which was filled out by his parents. I began a simple applied behavioral analysis program and monitored Aaron's progress on a monthly basis.

Block imitation, object imitation, and gross motor imitation were quickly mastered and he was following directions to sit and work without much hesitation, but his attention to task was minimal. He was very easily distracted by outside stimuli and rarely would attend to an activity without constant reminders to sit still and complete the task. The only play skills he exhibited at this point were actually preservative behaviors and self-stimulation.

Aaron was able to mimic words said by his therapist and frequently would spurt out a one word (rote) command. Spontaneous language was virtually nonexistent. He was a compliant child who appeared spaced out and quiet. He never greeted me when I came to visit, but would sit with me to do activities as I checked his mastery on them. He was learning at a steady pace, but it was obvious he still had a long way to go.

His preschool placement was going well, though he never played with his peers. He would follow the routines of the day and seemed to enjoy his classroom. His father was pushing to get him out of special education so that he could be with "normal" children. I knew there were several areas of his development that needed to be addressed prior to the school even considering a typical placement in the system.

In June of 2000 I conducted another assessment for the family using James Pardington's Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills. I was now able to fill in many more holes in Aaron's learning after I began his new program. He was able to identify his letters and numbers, knew many of his colors, and began to pretend play. My concern with him continued to be communication and lack of social ability. He was not interacting with peers, even with adult facilitation. According to the teacher's report he appeared to be "disconnected with the daily happenings in the classroom." He had "readiness splinter skills," but had "difficulty applying his knowledge to various learning situations." It was also reported in his Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that he "required large amounts of wait time as well as repetition to acquire new skills."

For the 2000 school year Aaron was placed in a special education kindergarten classroom geared towards social development and communication. I visited the classroom on many occasions and was horrified to see the lack of interaction between students and teacher. Aaron was just going through the motions of school. The other children were not social and most were much less functional than Aaron. He became very behavioral and disconnected, even at home. He had already learned what he was being taught in the class and he was declining rapidly. His ability to maintain eye contact was virtually nonexistent. He became completely disconnected.

I spoke with Aaron's father about the National Academy for Child Development, NACD. The family made an appointment for Aaron to be evaluated by Robert Doman in July of 2001. The evaluation was an "eye opening experience." By this time Aaron could say five words in a sentence, but the sentence was only one he had heard before. He would say "Aaron don't eat your shirt" and "leave the dog alone," but would never say anything relevant to what was happening at the time. He spoke very monotone and mouthed everything he could get his hands on. He was shy, quiet, and would hide to be by himself.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Aaron began the TLP Kit, CD 1 in July of 2001. He had a hard time sitting through the sessions and needed assistance keeping the headphones on so he spent two weeks getting used to listening. By mid July he was able to listen to 15 minutes per day with supervision, so he began the Extended Schedule of 15 minutes, once a day, for five days per week.

By the time he reached CD 5 he was able to sit and attend without any adult redirection. He began to smile and play with minimal prompting and seemed to be less defiant. He had more eye contact and was more calm and relaxed. Aaron was still unable to answer questions posed to him by an adult unless the answer was prompted. He began to learn sight words quickly and soon learned 100 flags and the presidents of the United States. He started to eat his meals at the table and stopped having to be reminded not to climb on the furniture.

He greeted me without prompting for the first time in September of 2001. He was "listening" to conversations at our meetings and was much more tuned in after only two and a half months on the auditory program. He had an improved attention span, was more expressive, and less distractible. He also had a more upright posture. His learning was fast and we struggled to find new information to input. He was still talking monotone and his spontaneous language was infrequent. He would repeat things we said to him and would answer only simple questions. These questions were ones he had been taught to answer. He had yet to grasp the abstract side of language.

By December of 2001 Aaron's digit span was emerging five. His eye contact was more typical and he was beginning to show affect when he spoke. He was able to attend to TLP without any redirection from an adult and continued with the Extended Schedule for the second cycle. Aaron seemed extremely well focused after his listening sessions and was beginning to sing. Though his speech was still monotone, he began to say things we knew no one had taught him. He would ask us to draw him "a horse and a cat." He was beginning to chain thoughts together.

I saw him in January and he told me, "We took our tree down." He had noticed me looking over to where the tree stood only one month ago. Aaron's language was becoming spontaneous! In February his sentence structure had improved and he was remembering people's names. By March Aaron was initiating reading, and math was easier for him. He was more independent with increased self-confidence. He no longer needed instructions repeated.

In April of 2002, Aaron was evaluated by NACD's Robert Doman for the third time. He was able to do second grade math and could recognize second grade words. He was becoming more stable with his running and could play games like hop scotch and basketball. His gait had changed considerably and his cross patterning was much improved. He was holding a pencil and could write his name without any difficulty. He was talking *to* people instead of *for* people. He had begun playing with toys and would show others what he had made. He was able to get someone's attention and could answer many questions posed to him. He was showing expression in his face when speaking and began "cracking jokes." He was giggly and flirty and had a little deviant look in his eye at times. Aaron was becoming more and more typical each month that passed.

By August of 2002 Aaron was almost at a third grade level in reading and was working on comprehension. He sat through the entire evaluation with a smile on his face. He is still somewhat quiet, but when he gets talking it is hard to get him to stop. He is silly and loves to make people laugh. He can follow a multi-step written direction and is drawing wonderful pictures of things in his environment. He will begin second grade this fall. His parents are beginning to think of their son as a typical child instead of a child with multiple disabilities. I am looking forward to his wonderful future.

In September of 2002 I attended Aaron's seventh birthday party. He had many of the children from his school there as well as several adults. He was singing and dancing. He was talking without monotone to children he had never seen before and asking if he could join in when they were playing. He was joining in conversations with adults and children. I got his attention from across a noisy room by only calling his name one time. He was able to maintain eye contact with everyone he talked to. He was so typical and so happy! He did not cover his ears once, nor did he revert to any of his autistic-like behaviors during the incredibly stimulating birthday party.

In October of 2002 I attended his IEP. The school brought in a specialist who observed him over several days. She reported his attention and behavior to be that of a typical child. She saw him initiating with other children, playing by the rules in Physical Education and following the routines of the classroom without any difficulty. She said, "If someone told me to find the child with autism in this classroom, Aaron would have been the LAST child I would have chosen."

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

Aaron has done considerably well since beginning TLP and his NACD program only 15 months ago. He has been through numerous cycles of TLP and continues to listen 15 minutes per day, 5 days per week. He is no longer monotone and has quite a personality! I had a wonderful conversation with him on the phone this week about where he was going with his best friend on the weekend. Having a friendship is not something I thought Aaron would experience so young, with such a devastating diagnosis. I attribute his success to The Listening Program®, and NACD. The small, lost child I met several years ago is gone. He has been replaced with a little boy with so much to live for, wanting and waiting to learn so much more.

End of Case Study

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