

# Success at The Early Learning Institute

Ask Julie Waugaman what The Early Learning Institute (TELI) has meant to her daughter Megan and you get an obvious heartfelt answer.

“Wow - where do I start?”

Julie and her husband, Tim, an Air National Guardsman stationed in Pittsburgh, are one of many hundreds of families in Allegheny County benefiting from TELI's professionals, who offer a continuum of care including early intervention and early childhood education programs with supportive services such as occupational, speech/language and physical therapies as well as vision, nutrition and social work services.

Megan, now 3, had been diagnosed early in life with substantial globalized developmental delays, “a fancy term that meant she had a hard time with walking and crawling,” Julie said. “On top of that, Megan was also diagnosed with speech apraxia, which means she can understand what we are saying to her but she can't form the words to communicate back to us even though she knows what she wants to say.”

One of Megan's therapists suggested the Waugamans look into another of TELI's programs once it became evident Megan was going to need a more elevated level of social involvement and therapy.

“As soon as Megan got a little older, we enrolled her in the Social Butterflies program, and it made a world of difference after just three or four sessions,” Julie said. “It was one of the best moves we ever made for her.”

Social Butterflies is a program designed to help children become more confident and less awkward among their peers through structured activities and play.

“At first Megan held back from the other kids - she would kind of stand off on the sidelines taking it all in,” Julie said. “But what really pulled her in were the music and dance programs. That was a great start. What we really loved about Social Butterflies was the fact that all of the activities change every 15 minutes or so. That rapid pace and new things to do seem to ensure that each child will find something of interest to pull them in with the other kids.”

“Megan made significant progress with us in a lot of ways from the time she started with us at 18 months until she moved to our preschool,” Melanie Hathaway said, TELI's Developmental Specialist/Social Butterflies Coordinator. “Her eye contact improved and so did her desire to want to ‘share’ with the other kids. At first she didn't like to hold hands when we would sing in a circle, but



## The Early Learning Institute

Serving Children and Their Families for Over 50 Years

- The curriculum at The Early Learning Institute's (TELI) preschools is based upon proven approaches to help children to grow socially and academically.
- TELI offers a variety of programming for children aged 12 months to young school age to meet the needs of families:

- Child care and extended day programs
- Half-day or full-day options
- A preschool program for two-year olds
- Potty-training not required
- Rolling admission



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after several months, she became very comfortable with holding hands and was a much stronger participant.”

Julie said another positive aspect to Social Butterflies was Megan's ability to be able to sit in one place for more than 15 minutes. “Arts and crafts really interested her and we found that was the first activity she would sit still for. We were impressed that TELI's therapists could get her to do that,” Julie said. “They worked wonders with her - the scope of the therapists just amazed us.”

To compensate for the speech apraxia, TELI's therapists made a series of “picture signs” that have simple words and stick figures that help Megan better communicate her needs and feelings.

Megan was in Social Butterflies for about two years then moved on to TELI's early child-

hood education program in June 2010, where she now attends classes three days a week.

“There have been so many positive aspects to our involvement with TELI, but I would say from Megan's standpoint the biggest plus is for her to be able to communicate with people other than her immediate family members. That has helped expand her world a lot,” Julie said, looking back on the past two years. “And our relationship with TELI has benefited me by being able to be with parents who are in a similar circumstance with their children.” ▲

**Editor's Note:** There are now three Social Butterflies program in the Pittsburgh area for children 18 months to three years, and TELI also has a Baby Butterflies class for children 9-17 months. For more information, call 412-884-4262, ext. 210.