



Life can be unpredictable. The twists and turns encountered are those that determine the paths we take to live our best life. This revelation was true for the Sullivan family as their precious daughters were diagnosed with autism.

Mrs. Michelle Sullivan recollects, "Both of our girls, Samantha and Mallory, were diagnosed with autism at age two. After early intervention, we looked at numerous schools that specialized in children who required individualized attention for their needs around the area. We chose DDI."

Their family's new path began with the single step to DDI.



In 2010, daughter Samantha would begin her preschool experience at DDI's Early Childhood Learning Center, which provides enriching state-of-the-art, empirically based teaching methodologies to help children gain the skills necessary to be successful in their home, community, and school settings.

While Samantha attended the program, she was able to acquire skills through a combination of [discrete trial instruction](#) and small group learning.

She also learned how to attend and interact with her peers in a larger integrated setting.

"The teachers and the staff are enthusiastic, kind, loving, and patient. They take their time with each individual student to help them do their best," said Mrs. Sullivan.

Being a Big Sister: A Story for Sam



I am a big sister.
My sister's name is Mallory.
Being a big sister is so much fun! I can show
Mallory how to play and do fun things with
her and mommy!



These interactions and connections did not stop with peers.

The teaching staff were able to help foster the relationship between the two girls with a Social Story for Samantha called *"How to be a Big Sister,"* which broke down concepts such as emotions and conversations, as well as focused on the joys of having a little sister.

Samantha benefited from these various learning opportunities and was able to receive instruction that addressed her learning abilities, both individually and in a group setting.

"It was such a pleasure to have Sam in my class for her first preschool year and see her grow into a vibrant, outgoing girl. Her love for crafts, glitter, and stars truly demonstrated her personality, and we were lucky to see her grow and move onto the next learning environment," commented Education Behavior Specialist Corinne Meuschke.

It was because of this success that Mrs. Sullivan again chose DDI's Early Childhood Learning Center for her younger daughter, Mallory.

Because no two people with autism are the same, Mallory's abilities were best suited for more individualized, intensive approaches that were evaluated daily, allowing for teaching strategies to be modified to accelerate her learning.

She was working on the imitation of sounds and words when she began at DDI and progressed in all areas of academic and social development.

Classroom Teacher Jen Szoyka fondly remembers the first time Mallory spontaneously greeted her peers. "We worked with Mallory for a long time teaching her to generalize the skills she learned. I will never forget the day that she walked out of the classroom into the hallway where she saw a group of people and immediately said, 'Hi, people.' Right before our eyes, she had made this great connection between the greeting and the fact that there were many people in front of her who she could say 'Hi' to."



Keeping consistency across the home and school environment is very important for the success of students attending early childhood programs within DDI. The parent training component provides caregivers the opportunity to learn how to carry over the strategies learned in school to their home and to the community. Also, the evening parent training modules offer the education and discussion of topics ranging from an introduction to autism to functions of behavior to toilet training.

Mrs. Sullivan was an active participant in these trainings for both of her daughters and remained, and continues to remain, their biggest advocate.

“We cannot thank DDI enough for all their hard work and dedication towards our two daughters,” said Mrs. Sullivan.

The Early Childhood Learning Centers in Huntington, Medford, and Ronkonkoma offer a variety of preschool classes and achieve a remarkable 88% placement rate of students into their home school district by kindergarten.

Today, both Samantha and Mallory are currently enrolled in elementary school in their home school district of Connetquot.

Samantha and Mallory are beautiful shining stars continuing on life’s journey with their family and their peers.



We are grateful to have been active partners throughout their preschool years. Being able to help children and adults with autism and other developmental disabilities experience personal growth and fulfillment is DDI’s purpose. You can share a vital role in this purpose by joining us to [support our many stars](#). Together we can guide their paths to ensure they reach their fullest potential and enjoy all the gifts that life has to offer.