

## **Kira's Story**

*Kira's mother wrote to us in March 2006 five months after her daughter completed the core listening training program of 60 hours...While Kira's story is unique, within last few years we helped a few girls with similar profile as Kira's all of whom responded very well to the program with nice gains in their ability to adapt to the demands of the environment, ability to express themselves both through language, drawings and in play, more effectively engage socially and think more abstractly. We wanted to share her story with you partly because girls are largely underrepresented in the world of autism and parents with children like Kira are often lacking a point of reference.*

My daughter Kira\* was different from birth. She cried more than the other babies, and although she was active and inquisitive, she seemed less tuned to us and responsive to us than we expected. She was hypersensitive to a lot of noises, but wouldn't hear people calling her name. She avoided eye contact, but was incredibly observant about small details everywhere in her environment. In stimulating environments she bounced from activity to activity without ever really settling.

Three pediatricians diagnosed her with autism, and I was both devastated and incredibly frustrated. It just didn't seem to fit. Kira could be responsive, expressive, thoughtful, articulate, creative, empathetic, engaged... but only when the moment was right. Too much stimulation – and the evaluating environments were always very cluttered and stimulating – and she couldn't stay organized long enough to show what she could do. I knew she had tons of potential, but had no idea of how to unlock it. It didn't help when some of the helping professionals would see the diagnosis on her chart and assume they knew what she was like, and what she needed, without ever bothering to look past the label and see the unique child. She had just turned 4 when we contacted the Listening Centre.

At the Listening Centre, I felt like I'd finally come to a place where people looked first at my daughter, not her diagnostic labels; they were seeing her individual strengths and weaknesses, and not a stereotype in their own minds. It was both liberating and a huge relief. Then they amazed me when they got Kira accepting the headphones in only 30 seconds when I was ready to swear it would take days and days. She loved her therapy sessions, and ran in the front door of the Centre every day in anticipation of another session at "The Music House".

Right away I noticed that her auditory processing time seemed to shorten, and she was able to take part in rapid-fire discussions (and arguments!) in a way she never had before. She also started to be night-dry intermittently, and after years of acute sound sensitivities, flushed a toilet voluntarily for the first time in her life. Her fantasy play took a huge leap, and I felt that she was much more "in command" of herself. She stopped liking music and started to LOVE it – demanding it frequently, singing along... it was as if the therapy had made her hungry for more. That was all during the two intensives.

In the five months since then, she has had a burst of abstract thinking and fantasy play. She is able to stay focused on interacting with peers and teachers for longer than ever before. She loves playing with other children and improvising games together.

Her communication skills have taken off incredibly. When she was evaluated four months before the Tomatis intensives, her expressive and receptive language skills scored as significantly delayed, in the 19<sup>th</sup> percentile for her age. Two and a half months after the intensives, those skills were tested again, and she ranked in the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile for expressive language and the 99<sup>th</sup> for receptive language – over a year beyond her age level.

Her sound sensitivities have steadily declined (I've gone from only vacuuming when she was out of the house to being able to vacuum when she's in the same room!) Her fine motor delays have disappeared in a burst of artistic expression. Her formless scribbles have given way to pictures of people, flowers, animals, space ships, insects, birds – all with some story attached. “The boy is delivering an envelope.” “The flower was lonely so the gardener came and planted some more.” “This is a factory that makes cupcakes.” “This is me thinking about butterflies.” “Here's my brother climbing a ladder.” And my favourite, “This is my Mom 'cause she's so beautiful.”

Kira continues to be a puzzle for the school system. Various professionals continue to work mightily to make a single syndrome account for all the ways she isn't quite what they expect. None of it fits. But they all have to acknowledge the intelligence, perceptiveness, humour, creativity and gregariousness that she brings to the classroom along with her remaining difficulties with focusing and self-regulation. Many thanks to the Listening Centre for being among the first to see those shining qualities, and for helping to uncover them for the rest of the world.

*\* the name of the girl in this story has been changed*