

Autism After the Masgutova Method®

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I watched in awe as Benji spoke in front of a group of therapists, parents and children last night at the start of the Masgutova Method® intensive therapy Conference, “Hello, I’m ten years old and I started coming to these conferences when I was five because I have Autism Spectrum Disorder...” He spoke clearly, had great eye contact, and peppered his chat with appropriate humor. Afterward, several therapists and parents approached me and said, “Autism spectrum? Really? It does not seem that way to me!”

Today, autism no longer defines Benji but it wasn’t always that way. We spent many desperate years first wondering if he would ever stop crying, then whether he’d ever learn to speak, and later whether he’d ever be comfortable in his own skin. We tried play therapy, OT, PT, speech therapy, ABA, The Listening Program, Relationship Development Intervention®, and HANDLE, all of which helped him make some progress, although it seemed glacial. I watched other children easily learn to talk and walk, easily transition from bottle to cup and easily try new things and meet new people. My child resisted everything different. He was inconsolable if I didn’t push his stroller in the same direction each and every time we went for a walk. When we finally summoned the courage to take away his bottle, for almost a year, he refused to drink from anything but the garden hose. He didn’t sleep through the night, no matter what sleep expert we consulted, until he was six years old.



Benji Gans in 2014.

After endless amounts of searching, we found some therapies that really worked. The summer after he finished kindergarten, we went to his first Masgutova conference. To me, the therapy looked like a relaxing massage. My son, on the other hand, viewed it as an attack. Fortunately, my Dad came with me to that conference. It took everything in both of our power to keep Benji on those massage tables so that the therapy could begin to calm his overactive nervous system. We stuck pennies in his toes to distract him, we took turns singing in his ear, we bribed him, promised him a swim in the ocean if he’d just hold it together for 10 more minutes. It was the longest four days of my life.

As we drove home, I already knew it had been worth it...the child who could previously only express his feelings by crying or cowering in fear said, “Whose stupid idea was it to come to this place? I never want to do that



Debby & Benji Gans

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Benji Gans in 2014.

again!" During the next few weeks, the changes were apparent and easily visible. Benji's entire affect relaxed. His ability to self-regulate improved. He began to express his feelings. He became curious about the world and began to fear it less. Suddenly, he could walk without tripping. And, he quickly decided that his "cushions" (orthotics) were uncomfortable and asked that they be removed from his shoes! Within a month the shape of his foot began to change. His curved toes dramatically straightened.

The most dramatic shift was evident one evening about 6 weeks later...

"There were a lot of policeman in the Chinese restaurant tonight. I wonder why they were there."

He was quiet for a minute, then continued "the policeman who came to our table called me 'little buddy.' That's because he didn't know my name." Suddenly, he could both process and analyze interpersonal relationships. For so long, I feared he'd never be able to

do that. After five years, we continue to see changes thanks to Dr. Masgutova and her amazing team.

The Masgutova Method was a key, major element in Benji's struggle against autism. But, as all special needs parents come to learn, there is no one magic, silver bullet that can fix all of the issues. So, while doing our daily Masgutova exercises at home, I continued to search for other tools to help Benji move more easily through the world.

We found a developmental pediatrician near us in Florida who understood Benji and offered tons of practical advice. Dr. Udell discovered that Benji could tolerate casein, but not gluten. When we took him off gluten, he could focus more. Later, Dr. Udell suggested we give Benji a small dose of caffeine each morning. It further improved his focus and it lacked the side effects of traditional medications.

Last year, we stumbled upon an autism research study that also made an enormous impact. It evaluated brain changes in mildly autistic children after intensive work using the Lindamood-Bell learning process (LMB). Benji attended both school and four hours of intensive therapy each day, 65 miles from home. It was tedious, but certainly worth it! He had easily learned to read words years before, but until LMB he couldn't understand what he read. He learned to draw conclusions, especially when eaves-dropping on my conversations. And he understood that his grandmother was dying even though no one told him. He insisted on speaking at her funeral and spoke with the eloquence of an adult, not a child on the spectrum.

This past weekend, he returned from an amazing overnight camp for boys with social anxiety and ADHD. A few years ago, I never dreamed he'd be able to function independently ever, let alone at ten. He thrived there and returned more organized, thoughtful, and seemed to have matured two years in three weeks!

Not only did he finally learn to talk, he also leaves an indelible impression on everyone who knows him. He is sweet, loving, and will sometimes still hold my hand in public places. In the beginning, I expected to be the teacher. Now, I realize that he came into the world to teach me many things...the power of hope, the ability to think outside of the box in order to solve problems, the strength of optimism, and above all, to believe that anything is possible.



We thank Debby and Benji for their confidence in the MNRI® program and her tenacious love of Benji and perseverance in finding hope and treatment for him. – Dr. Masgutova and her MNRI® Team