

# THE EDUCATOR WHO SAW MY SON



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MOTHER

I still remember the first time someone said it out loud.

It wasn't a doctor. It wasn't during a scheduled check-up or a formal assessment. It was one of Justin's early childhood educators (ECEs).

At the time, Justin was just a toddler—busy, curious, and full of personality. To me, he was perfect. But his educator saw something more. Not something “wrong,” but something worth paying attention to. She approached me gently, thoughtfully, and with care.

She didn't alarm, but instead she guided me. She shared what she was noticing. She explained what it might mean. And most importantly, she helped me understand what to do next.

That moment changed everything.

ECEs are often the first professionals, outside of baby wellness visits, to regularly see children in real social environments. As a result, they notice patterns. They see how children interact, communicate, regulate, and grow. They don't just see a snapshot; they see the whole child, over time.

Because of Justin's educator, we were able to connect with services early. We began the assessment, diagnosis, and support process far sooner than we otherwise would have. Early identification and intervention became the foundation of his journey, and it has made all the difference.

Today, Justin is thriving in ways I once worried might not be possible. This didn't happen by chance. It happened because someone with expertise, experience, and care was there, paying attention.

That's what ECEs do. They are skilled professionals who observe, guide, and partner in children's development. They build relationships with families and help us navigate moments we don't yet understand.

I often think about how easily Justin's story could have been different. If his classroom had been short-staffed. If educators had constantly been moved from room to room to fill gaps. If there had been a revolving door of unfamiliar faces. If the ECE who noticed him hadn't had the time, work environment, or support to truly see him.

Would I have been guided to the right supports at the right time? Would Justin be on the same path he is today?

These are not hypothetical questions. They are the reality of a system under strain.

When early childhood education is treated as precarious work, and when educators are underpaid, overworked, and stretched thin, the quality of relationships suffers. And relationships are where the magic happens. They are where children are known, where patterns are seen, and where early signs are recognized.

The long-term value of this cannot be overstated. When ECEs identify children with additional needs early and connect them to support, the trajectory of their lives can change. This means that families are better supported, children are more confident, and systems are more responsive.

This is not just good for children; it is good for all of us.

Justin is where he is today because an educator had the time, the knowledge, and the stability to truly see him.

We cannot afford to lose that.

Because when we invest in early childhood educators, we are not just supporting a workforce; we are shaping the future of children like my son.



Listen to Tennelle's full story in [Episode 1 of \*Unlocking Potential: The Benefits of Early Childhood Education\*](#) (12:59), also featuring Dr. Jean Clinton, and economist Armine Yalnizyan, as they discuss the powerful role early childhood education plays in shaping children, families, and society.