



Heidi Makes the Connection

**By Teresa Alexander-Arab,
Hanen SLP and clinical writer**

While I have seen the lives of many children and families enhanced through taking the *It Takes to Talk*® Program, it is Heidi's story that stands out for me. Heidi had been receiving speech and language services along with Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and Early Intervention from the time she was two years old. I took over her case when she was four. Heidi was born with a severe developmental delay; she was in a wheel chair as she could not walk or crawl. She was fed via a gastric tube as she had difficulty eating. We knew she had some vision, but we were never sure how much she could discriminate. We did know that her hearing was normal. Heidi's communication level at the age of four was 'Discoverer'. She reacted to how she felt and to the world around her but she did not communicate intentionally with anyone.

At five years of age, her communication status was unchanged. I was planning an *It Takes Two to Talk* Program and I offered it to her mother. I explained that Heidi would be the most delayed child in the group. Heidi's mother decided that she wanted to take the program. She and I believed that it would benefit both of them as Heidi was often unhappy in the hospital setting and seemed most content at home. I thought that if we could move some of the strategies into the home on a consistent basis, that we might see some change. Over the next 3 months, Heidi's mother attended every group session. She made links with other parents and was the first to celebrate when another child made an advancement. She cheered on other parents in the program when they were discouraged. She always developed a home plan and was consistent in its implementation. She never complained once that Heidi was delayed and that she did not seem to be making any progress.

At the end of the program, the parents decided that they wanted to have a 'party'. They wanted to meet the other children. I found the space and made the arrangements. The

parents brought snacks and some toys for sharing. I borrowed mats from the Rehab department and one grandmother brought a guitar. During the party, Heidi sat in her wheelchair. It was hard to tell if she was seeing the activity or not but she was not upset by the noise. When the music started she turned her head and stared intently at the woman with the guitar. The music stopped. Heidi made a vocalization. We all looked at her. She was staring at the guitar and made the sound again. The grandmother played another verse. She then stopped and waited. Heidi made her noise again. The guitar started and Heidi smiled. She laughed. Every time the guitar stopped, she vocalized. Every time it started, she smiled and laughed. We were all in tears. Heidi had made the communication connection!

Heidi continued in treatment with me before transferring to school. During our last year together we were able to introduce an Augmentative System for her to use to make requests. Given that Heidi was 5 years old at the start of the *It Takes Two to Talk* Program and still a Discoverer, I firmly believe that it was the mother's consistent following of the Hanen principles that helped Heidi make the "communication connection" and move on to the Communicator stage.

About The Hanen Centre

Founded in 1975, The Hanen Centre is a Canadian not-for-profit charitable organization with a global reach. Its mission is to provide parents, caregivers, early childhood educators and speech-language pathologists with the knowledge and training they need to help young children develop the best possible language, social and literacy skills. This includes children who have or are at risk for language delays, those with developmental challenges such as autism, and those who are developing typically.

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