



# RESEARCH RUNDOWN

## Meaningful Outcomes for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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We studied outcomes of 85 preschool children with autism spectrum disorder. The children received at least 1 year of community-based intensive behavioural intervention. We looked at the meaningful benefit to children in terms of their communication, social, and adaptive skills.

### What is this research about?

Autism spectrum disorders affect many children and their families. Early intensive behavioural intervention (EIBI) is the most-evidence supported treatment for these children. Much of the supporting evidence so far has come from small, carefully-controlled model programs. What is the effectiveness of EIBI under “real-world” conditions? What can we say about the meaningful benefit to children in terms of their communication, social, and adaptive skills? To address these important questions, we looked at the effectiveness of EIBI delivered by a community agency in Manitoba. We analyzed data for children who received one year of EIBI service from the St.Amant Autism Early Learning Program.

### What did the researchers do?

We studied results from the Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills (ABLLS). The ABLLS describes specific skills and accomplishments that families desire for developing children. Our focus was on *communication*, *social*, and *adaptive* skills. We analyzed data collected for 85 children who had results on at least one of these areas at program start (intake), and after 1 year.

### What did the researchers find?

#### *Communication*

The ABLLS describes 600 different communication skills. All children had mastered new skills after 1 year, in skill areas like listening, imitating, requesting, and labeling. The average percentage of skills mastered had increased by 20 points. The benefit was especially noticeable among children who started with the fewest skills. At intake, over

### What you need to know:

Children in a community-based EIBI program gained many valuable skills during the first year of service.

70% of children had mastered less than one-fifth of the targeted skills. After a year of service, this proportion dropped to less than 30%.

#### *Social Skills*

The ABLLS describes 124 different social skills. All children had also mastered new social skills after 1 year, in areas like cooperation, play and leisure, and social interaction. Mean percentage of social skills mastered increased by 25 points. The benefit for children who started with the fewest skills was dramatic. At intake, over 60% of children had mastered less than one-fifth of the social skills. After a year of service, this proportion dropped to less than 5%.

#### *Adaptive Skills*

The ABLLS describes 88 different adaptive skills. For example, skills are taught in the areas of dressing, eating, grooming, and toileting. The mean percentage of adaptive behaviours mastered increased by 19 points. Children in the program made great strides towards full independence



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in these areas. At intake, only 13% of children had mastered more than three-fifths of adaptive skills. After a year of service, that proportion increased to an impressive 40%.

## Why is it important?

Our work shows that children with autism spectrum disorder made significant gains in a “real world” program. We used measures that translate into meaningful outcomes for children and their families.

## Research Team

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## Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Department of Family Services and Labour.



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St.Amant Research Centre is possible thanks to support from St.Amant Foundation and The Winnipeg Foundation, and through partnership with the University of Manitoba.

## Additional Resources

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Project completed 2013. Please see: <http://stamant.ca/research/our-research/project-summaries/> for more project summaries.