



All children will develop, learn and grow to realize their full potential.



Ashli and her children with Claudia, Parent Educator during a PAT home visit

In her eight years as a parent educator, Claudia Williamson has helped dozens of young parents find a path to success. She's on the front lines of the Parents as Teachers vision, to help all children learn, grow and develop to reach their full potential.

***"I build relationships with families," said Williamson. "And building trust is the best way to support parents in helping their children succeed."***

Williamson works for Maine Families of Knox, Lincoln and Sagadahoc counties. The organization implements the highly successful evidence-based home visiting model, Parents as Teachers, and is funded by the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program. The federal grant, together with critical funding from the state, serves vulnerable families in every county in Maine. Home visiting provides parents with the skills and knowledge they need to be successful parents, building on family strengths to achieve the best possible outcomes for their children. "We know parents want to be the best that they can be," said Williamson. "We're just here to give them that support."

Williamson says one of her proudest memories is working with a mom named Ashli Bickford. During home visits, it became clear to Williamson that Bickford's youngest child Cooper was having a difficult time meeting developmental milestones and might have delays that were previously unnoticed.

"It was a very emotional experience," said Bickford. "His head was large and he wasn't using one side of his body. So I wanted Claudia to tell me the truth, even if she thought it would hurt my feelings. I asked her point blank, "Claudia, do you think there's something wrong with my son?""

Claudia supported Ashli's desire to find answers and recommended she make an appointment that day with her pediatrician. When that doctor was unable to make a diagnosis, Claudia encouraged Ashli to advocate for her four-month-old son's health and get a second opinion. But after an MRI and a series of screenings, doctors were still stumped.

"A year went by and we couldn't get any answers," said Bickford. "By 18 months, Cooper still wasn't walking and couldn't even sit up by himself. Claudia said I shouldn't give up, and urged me to make another appointment."

Finally, after a round of genetic testing, doctors diagnosed Cooper with an extremely rare condition called 3Q13.31 micro dilution syndrome. It's a chromosome deletion disorder that only affects a handful of people in the United States. Bickford says the diagnosis was devastating and she immediately broke down into tears. But a single phone call to her parent educator helped change her perspective.

"Claudia told me I should treat the news as something positive, because we finally have answers," said Bickford. "I didn't give up because of her."

Thanks to the continued support of Maine Families, Parents as Teachers and the help of an in-home occupational therapist, Cooper is now walking and talking and thriving in preschool. Ashli is now going to school to be an occupational therapist, so she can help other families in similar situations.

***"I stand behind Maine Families and the Parents as Teachers program 100%," said Bickford. "It changed my life and my son's life forever."***