

One Mom's Story

How Education Savings Accounts changed my child's life

By Holland Hines

With the ice storms, snow-ins, and power outages, February in Michigan can feel a little bleak. But in February 2005, our world was filled with joy with the arrival of our son Elias.

Around four months old, however, Elias began to change, and we realized he was very different from our four older children. He was difficult to console. He needed constant attention, constant feedings, and a never-ending supply of new rooms, toys, and environments to keep him content. He needed to be held all the time, and woke about 15 to 25 times a night.

We searched for answers, and when Elias was 10 months old, I read a description of the clinical presentations for Asperger's Syndrome and Autism. My heart dropped as I realized that I had found my answer. We then began a journey to find the right therapeutic services and educational interventions.

I spent months researching and speaking with experts. I learned that Elias would need 20 to 40 hours per week of one-on-one habilitation, speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and even music and aquatic therapy. He also needed a special school environment with specially trained teachers.

We also realized that we would need to move back to my home state, Arizona, to take advantage of the education opportunities there and be close to family and friends. My husband and I left jobs we loved and a close-knit community in search of help for Elias.

Elias's educational needs are diverse. Along with autism he has hyperlexia, which is a precocious reading ability. He was reading by the time he was 18 months old, without ever being taught. By two he could read beginner books but could not say "mama" or point to something he wanted. By the time he started preschool at three, his skills ranged from the expressive language skills of an 11-month old to the reading and comprehension skills of an 8-year old.

At first he attended a regular public school, but by the beginning of second grade, it was obvious that they weren't equipped to help him. I was being



Holland Hines making music with her 8-year-old son, Elias.

called several times a week to pick up a crying, shaking little boy who was crouched under a table and asking for help.

I knew what he needed. He needed to be taught at a level that was interesting and challenging to him. He needed friends; typical children as well as special needs kids. He needed a well-trained teaching staff and a low classroom child/teacher ratio.

When I read about a new Arizona law that created education savings accounts, I couldn't believe it at first. This was exactly what we needed! Ninety percent of my son's state education funding could be put into an account that we could use for private schooling,

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— HOLLAND HINES, MOM

tutoring, and therapeutic services.

I learned that the Goldwater Institute had helped write the legislation that created the education savings accounts. I knew little about the Goldwater Institute, but being a Phoenix native, I remembered meeting Barry Goldwater and shaking his hand at Park Central mall when I was a child. My parent's politics were not the same as his, but I knew that they respected him and how he tried to bring people together for the things that really mattered to Arizonans.

Elias is now happily attending a private school that was created for children of all abilities, with a fantastic teaching staff who have years of training. He has an adapted schedule that allows him to attend school half time to work on academics, social interaction, and classroom etiquette. The other half of his school week is spent attending speech, occupational, physical, and music therapies that his doctor prescribes. And all of this is perfectly tailored to his needs.

Elias is now excited for school and comes home happy about what he is learning. His academics have improved tremendously, his anxiety at home and school is almost gone, and his ability to remain at school for his scheduled school day has greatly improved.

Nothing about having a special-needs child has been easy. But this savings account has been one of the most exciting and rewarding experiences of our family's journey. The program allows the one person who knows best what their child needs—their parent—to make the most important education decisions for their child.

I am excited about what education savings accounts will mean to Arizona, and hope other states will embrace this educationally sound and fiscally responsible alternative. It will make countless lives better. ■

Holland Hines' son is a participant in Arizona's Education Savings Account program.

Quotable

What people are saying about the Goldwater Institute

The Goldwater Institute is a model for others around the country fighting for freedom.

— STEVE FORBES, PUBLISHER

Arizona is the leader in offering choice and competition, thanks largely to the work that's been done here at Goldwater.

— JOHN STOSSEL,
AUTHOR OF 'NO, THEY CAN'T'