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Marco Severi is using early intervention supports, including a tailored program for children with autism or autistic traits, to prepare for the classroom.

Doctors diagnosed Marco, 4, from Beveridge, north of Melbourne, with autism in 2021.

Marco's mum Raelene Severi recalls some tough times before accessing the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) 2 years ago.

'We were paying out-of-pocket medical expenses,' said Raelene, a former administrator in the construction industry.

'It was a struggle, as I was unable to return to work.

'We don't have family or friends here to help us.

'When the NDIS plan was approved, it was a great relief.'

Marco faces challenges with speaking, often struggling to convey his wants and needs in conversation.

Under his NDIS plan, Marco attends regular speech and occupational therapy sessions, which help to develop his language and fine motor skills.

He also goes to La Trobe University's Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre in Melbourne.

The centre builds communication, cognitive development and adaptive skills in children aged up to 5 years.

It uses a play-based approach, the Early Start Denver Model, to help develop a child's communication and encourage relationships with peers, so that they're better prepared for school.

Raelene says Marco has improved his social interaction since he has been at La Trobe.

'We were very lucky to get Marco in there,' Raelene said.

‘He’s been accepted for a second year, which will prepare him for school.’

Through La Trobe, Marco accesses an augmentative alternative communication (AAC) software. The software, which can be loaded on a tablet device, is designed to help children communicate, initially through symbols, before learning words through a letter keyboard.

‘One of the goals is to get Marco communicating using an AAC device,’ Raelene said.

A key player in Marco’s life is Malinda, his early childhood co-ordinator at Intereach.

‘Working with Marco and his family has been incredibly rewarding,’ Malinda said.

‘We have established a strong connection.

‘I’m here to offer guidance and celebrate Marco’s progress.’

Marco’s plan also includes funding for speech and occupational therapies.

‘Marco’s growth has been remarkable,’ Malinda said.

‘He is developing the skills to produce two-syllable combinations.

‘Marco has gained the confidence to express himself.’

While Marco is benefitting from his supports, so is the entire family.

‘Without the NDIS, I don’t know where we’d be,’ Raelene said.

‘I’m so grateful. I’m a true believer in early intervention.

‘Without NDIS funding, Marco couldn’t go to La Trobe, where he is doing so well.

‘We have seen huge changes in him.

‘Marco is coming out of his shell.’

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