

# Know Me

NAME *Kai*

PASSION *Tractors*

## My Story

Meet 3-year-old Kai Merry through the words of his parents, Alan and Jordan Merry:

Kai is the sweetest and happiest boy you will ever meet. He just turned 3 years old and we celebrated with one of his favorite characters, Blippi! Kai loves tractors, monster trucks, digging in the dirt, and most importantly playing with his two brothers. Kai is the middle child of three; he has an older brother Maxwell, and a younger brother Teddy.

Kai has so many strengths and talents. If someone is sad or crying, Kai will be the first to go running up to the person to offer a hug, or even just play next to you. My husband and I call "Kai Everest" due to his incredible ability to climb just about anything!

Before Kai was born, we were anxiously waiting with an adoption agency to help grow our family. We were incredibly blessed to be matched with Kai's birth mother. We waited exactly 9 months before bringing our baby boy home from the hospital, which we felt was perfectly fitting.

Kai was a very good, quiet, and snuggly baby, who was adored by all and still is! We noticed around 18 months that Kai was not meeting his communication milestones, such as not pointing to basic things, such as mom and



YouTube

dad, and unable to identify things in books. He also was lacking in eye contact and socialization, so our doctor referred us to Stark County Early Intervention. I cannot say how incredibly blessed we are for that happening.

*Amanda Shull, a Developmental Specialist with Stark DD's Early Intervention came to our house and instantly she felt like she was part of our family. She taught us all about sensory seeking behaviors, and how to help Kai be successful with everyday tasks by meeting those sensory needs. The developmental team involved occupational therapy, speech, and dietary guidance into Kai's meetings as Kai continued to meet goals.*

We have met so many goals thanks to Early Intervention. When Kai was first evaluated, his receptive and expressive language was extremely low. His language has grown exponentially since that first meeting. He is able to identify all letters, colors, shapes, animals, numbers 1-10, and identify words.

Kai was diagnosed at 2 ½ with autism, childhood apraxia of speech, and sensory processing disorder. We have been utilizing some communication tools such as sign language and Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and he is starting to make some word approximations.

*Developmental Specialist Amanda Shull said: "Kai comments or make requests during play with his family by using sign language paired with a word approximation! Kai and his family have worked hard to understand Kai's sensory needs, to better understand the building blocks of communication, and have above all provided unconditional love and support. They took every strategy and suggestion made by Kai's Early Intervention team and used that concept to teach Kai new skills. Kai made tremendous progress the first 3 years of his life, because his parents were his best and first teachers!"*

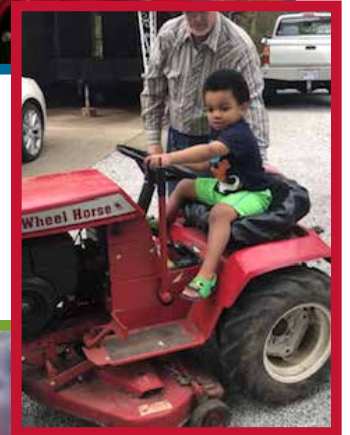
Now that he is 3 years old, Kai attends Stark DD's Eastgate Early Childhood and Family Center preschool autism program. We love it so far! His teacher is Holly Thomas and Kai just adores her. His father and I were nervous for nonverbal child to be away from us, but he is so loved by all the staff there he races to go every day.



*“Kai loves to know how things work,” said Holly Thomas, Stark DD Preschool Intervention Specialist. “His smile lights up the room and he is one very caring little boy.”*

As his parents, Alan and I understood that we would not be able to ask Kai all about his first day of school. We knew that he was in good hands and trusted he would have a great day. When he got home with pictures of his first day, we were brought to tears! He was enjoying Pete the Cat, playing with blocks, and having fun with friends. Those little things meant so much to us!

We can't begin to explain how grateful we feel to have Kai attending Stark DD's preschool. Stark County Early Intervention, Fairless School District and Eastgate have brought so much growth to not only Kai, but to our family as well. We can't imagine our life without them. Thank you!



# Know Stark DD



**Stark County Board of  
Developmental Disabilities**

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