

Jenna's Story

My name is Jenna, and I work in the field of child development. My husband Michael and I live here in Kawartha Lakes with our two children. Our youngest son, Watson, was born with mild cerebral palsy.

Every day, I work in this field doing psycho-educational assessments for youth, counselling children, or helping parents navigate the bumpy roads that come with raising kids who need a little extra support. You might think that my professional background would make it easier to recognize the signs in my own child, but in truth it made things complicated. On one hand, it gave me tools to advocate. On the other, it made me second-guess myself. Was I worrying too soon? Was I overanalyzing? Or was I missing something important?

At just five months old, I made the decision to self-refer Watson to Five Counties Children's Centre. Looking back now, I can say without hesitation that it was the best decision I have ever made. Not only for my son, but for myself, and for the many families I've since been able to support who are walking a similar journey.

Over the past 18 months, we've accessed physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and specialized support through the feeding clinic. Each service has met us where we were, helping Watson overcome challenges and grow stronger step by step. And it wasn't just the therapy itself that mattered. It was the bonds we formed with the therapists, the office staff, and the teams who welcomed us. Even when his older sister Harper had to come along to a session, they found ways to include her and to make our whole family feel welcome. That kind of compassion has made this journey lighter for all of us.

And through this, I've gained a new appreciation for my sister-in-law, who is a Communicative Disorders Assistant. For years, I admired her dedication to her career, but I didn't fully understand the depth of her impact. Now, living this experience with my own child, I see why she chose this path. I see the patience, the creativity, and the heart it takes. I see how children's lives are changed because of professionals like her. What once felt like "her work" now feels personal to me, because I've watched how profoundly those efforts shape a child's future and a family's hope.

I've watched Watson's journey with awe. In those early days, the gap between him and his peers felt enormous, and that was scary. But with time, with therapy, and with the support of a caring team, that gap began to close. Slowly, steadily, beautifully. And every milestone felt like a miracle: a smile, a grasp, a step, a word. Each one reminded us that progress comes in many forms and that hope carries us forward.

I know I am fortunate. Being self-employed has given me the flexibility to attend appointments without the fear of missing work. Not every family has that privilege. And yet, even with flexibility, the journey can feel heavy. What has made it lighter is the warmth, expertise, and encouragement of a team who believed in my child just as much as I did, along with the sense of community found among other parents walking the same path. Because the truth is, progress is never made alone. A team makes it better. A supportive family and a group of friends make it possible.

What I have learned as a parent through Five Counties has also made me a better professional. I now understand the process and the services from both sides, and that has allowed me to guide the families who come into my clinic with not just professional advice, but lived experience. When a parent sits across from me, filled with fear and uncertainty, I can look them in the eye and say: I've been there. I know how it feels. And I promise there is hope.

Five Counties has given my family that hope. They've given Watson opportunities I once wasn't sure he would have. And they've given our community a gift that is beyond measure.

Jenna

Jenna, Proud Five Counties Mom

