

Preschool Day Treatment: A Key Part of the Fraser Autism Treatment Model



As the largest and most experienced autism services provider in Minnesota, Fraser delivers evaluation, treatment, information, and other supports to thousands of families affected by autism spectrum disorders (ASD) each year.

Fraser is nationally recognized for creating highly individualized treatment programs that help children develop a broad range of communication, social, cognitive, coping, and safety skills. Over the past three decades, Fraser has developed a unique treatment model that integrates Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA), developmental, and relationship based approaches. The Fraser model also incorporates mental health best practices like building multidisciplinary teams around the child's needs, supporting parents to be the team lead, and coordinating services with other community providers.

Fraser Autism Preschool Day Treatment Program

Fraser offers individualized intervention through more than 30 autism programs. Its most intensive service, Day Treatment, is designed for young children who have the most severe needs.

Day Treatment currently serves 120 children, ranging in age from 18 months to 7 years old. Nearly 90 percent started between the ages of 2 and 4 years old. About 20 percent live in a household that speaks English as a second language, and around 1 in 10 is Somali.

Most participants have a diagnosis of Autistic Disorder (80%). The remainder have a diagnosis of Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified – PDD-NOS (19%) or Asperger's Disorder (1%). Additionally, Fraser commonly serves a small number of children with Rett Syndrome and related disorders. One-quarter (27%) enroll with an IQ score of less than 70, which may be indicative of cognitive delay.

On average, children in Day Treatment receive 34 hours of integrated intervention per week.

This includes up to three hours per day of intensive, center-based Day Treatment, as well as other Fraser services (such as additional mental health, speech-language, and occupational therapies), parent-directed supports, and programming coordinated by Fraser and implemented by other community providers.

Children typically spend a little over a year in Day Treatment, although some are enrolled for up to three years.

Results

More than 80 families who had received Fraser autism services over the past five years, including Day Treatment, were recently interviewed in order to assess outcomes:

School services:

- 82% were enrolled in public school.
- 91% had an Individualized Education Plan.
- 18% spent no time in special education.
- 30% spent one quarter of their time in special education.

Communication skills:

- Nearly 9 in 10 communicated verbally as their primary form of communication.
- 68% communicated in complete sentences.
- 15% communicated using phrases.

A sample of parents also provided their feedback about the services their child received at discharge:

Parent satisfaction:

- At least 9 in 10 parents said therapy “met” or “exceeded” their expectations.
- 85% reported that their child was “moderately” or “much” improved as a result of the Fraser services.
- At least 9 in 10 parents rated Fraser staff as helpful, courteous, respectful, and supportive.

Fraser Autism Day Treatment: A case study

“David” began receiving services from Fraser at the age of 2 years old. At that time, David’s parents were concerned about his overall developmental delays, particularly a lack of communication. David was referred to Fraser for evaluation. After a diagnosis of autism was made, Fraser staff worked with David and his family to develop an individualized treatment plan focused on helping David improve his communication and social functioning.

David began attending Day Treatment five days a week. One of his first goals was offering to trade a toy to a peer during social interaction opportunities. Fraser staff divided the large goal into a series of small tasks and worked with David to master each one as he progressed toward offering to share toys with other children. At first, he needed help to acknowledge the presence of other peers, as well as cues to remember to offer them a toy. Within two months, David had mastered sharing toys using only verbal prompts from an adult. By the end of the third month, David mastered sharing toys with other children with no verbal or physical prompts. Having accomplished this initial goal of sharing toys with others, progressively larger goals were added to his individualized treatment plan.

Communication was another early focus area. David was primarily nonverbal when he started at Fraser. With support from the speech-language pathologist on his treatment team, David began using pictures as his primary way to communicate his wants and needs. Using these visual prompts, David began imitating sounds and words more consistently. As his language developed, the staff and his parents set additional goals to further increase David’s social communication abilities.

David has been in Day Treatment for 28 months. Today, he is learning to take appropriate conversational turns when talking with adults and other children. His goal is to soon be speaking independently with adults and other children without prompts or cues, which is a skill he will need when he enters elementary school.

“A key part of David’s success was involving his family as a core member of the Fraser team,” said Fraser psychologist Rachel Gardner.

In all cases, Fraser collaborates with the family to track the child’s progress and refine the treatment plan. If a child does not make progress toward mastering a task within a realistic timeframe, parents and caregivers help redefine the goal to more closely match the child’s current capabilities. A goal is not considered accomplished until the parents or caregivers observe it successfully achieved at home.



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