

HOMETOWN HERO:

# Jessica Lifson

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Ms. Lifson is a wonderful teacher of young children on the autism spectrum in her ECI classroom at Four Seasons. She has two sessions, morning and afternoon, and many of her students have autism. My son Tom is in her afternoon session. Tom has made incredible progress this year and Ms. Jessica has had a huge impact on that progress. I have seen Jessica pay close attention to Tom’s language, social, and sensory needs and plan activities, games, and crafts accordingly. You can tell she is very thoughtful about the goals on the IEP and how she is going to implement them. She is open to new approaches and therapies. She is constantly encouraging the children to learn new skills and become more independent. She takes every opportunity to work with the kids, even snack time and playtime. For example, she will give a child a few pieces of snack to require them to ask for more, or teach social skills during playtime. The best part of all is that she is kind and gentle with the kids (while still maintaining discipline), and I know they genuinely feel how much she cares for them. As a parent, you hope that your child’s teacher understands your child and Ms. Jessica really does. You can tell she understands that each child is unique and she doesn’t apply a cookie cutter approach to each child.

Ms. Jessica is also a great partner for a parent to work with. She listens to my concerns and she is always willing to work on tough issues with Tom, like toileting and eating new foods. Tom has a problem with sharing and she has given me great suggestions on how to work on it. She puts out a weekly newsletter for parents to let us know about the theme of the week, books they will read, activities they will do, and words of the week. It is so helpful in asking Tom about his day and trying to reinforce what he has learned.

The most amazing thing about Jessica is that she has all of the qualities listed above and SHE IS A FIRST YEAR TEACHER! Jessica graduated from the University of Maryland with a master’s in special education and specialty in early childhood and severe disabilities. This ECI class is her first classroom and she has done an amazing job. Jessica has faced the following challenges: Four Seasons has a class size of 8 to 11 children, all with various disabilities. They also have open classrooms. This is the first year the school has had the ECI and swing door programs. The morning class is very young and needy. Her afternoon class is higher-functioning but challenging. Oh, and by the way, Jessica’s class has the children of half of the officers of Friends of ECI, the parent group of birth-to-five special education students. It can’t be easy to have the sons of the PTA president and vice-president in her class, but she always looks happy to see us. In my opinion, Jessica got thrown into the deep end in her very first year and has performed beautifully.

I am very thankful that Tom got Ms. Jessica as his teacher, and he has grown so much because of it. Jessica Lifson is truly a Hometown Hero!