

Touch screen computers have provided a way of learning and communicating that plays to Samuel's strengths. As a result, devices like iPads are fast becoming a 'must have' for many families of children with Autism.

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When Janet went over to her new friend Stephanie's house, she met Stephanie's 4 year old

brother, Shawn. "Hi," said Janet, smiling. Shawn glanced at her and said nothing. Then he turned back to a computer game he held. Later, in Stephanie's room, Janet said, "I don't think your brother likes me."

"It's not your fault," explained Stephanie. "Shawn has Autism."

With April being "Autism Awareness" Month, your Call & Post Newspaper will continue by focusing on how children cope with Autism in series of articles.

What does Autism mean? According to Jim Tinaka, Ph.D., Autism (**aw-**thi-zum) causes kids to experience the world differently from the way most other kids do. It's hard for kids with Autism to talk with other people and express themselves using words.

Technology has completely and utterly changed the lives of many of those who have Autism; just ask the Williamsons. Mark and Tamika who lives in Akron, Ohio, have a 7-year old son Samuel who was born with Autism.

The stay-at-home dad and minister, along with his wife who works outside the home; spoke with your Call and Post about their only son who has Autism.

The couple said they had to come to reality that their son wasn't adjusting or learning the things he should have at his age. Doctors soon confirmed that young Samuel was Autistic.

"We had to learn to adjust to being the parents of an autistic son," said Mark.

It didn't mean that all was lost. In fact, the couple wanted to do all that they could to give Samuel as normal life as they could. "We enrolled him in Akron, Public School and he's come a long way with communicating and learning," Tamika stated as she pointed to Samuel.

The young man sat quietly in his small recliner, attention fixed on an iPad that mom said was given to him as a gift. It was a though he was in his own world; not a care of what was going on around him.

"Show me where the 'A' goes in that word, Samuel." Dad pointed to the word C_T... Samuel put the 'A' in the middle.

"These are the types of games that he gets to play with at school and at home on his iPad. He's even taught himself how to use our home computer."

The Williamsons said their mission is to allow Samuel to become independent and be accepted as other kids are. They strongly feel that as long as he continues to show he can learn, the more they would seek help in catering to his learning environment.

They shared how technology has completely and utterly changed Samuel's life, how he has gone from being a little boy who had no way of showing how much he knows to one who now has portable devices that allows him to laugh, play, and engage.

"He also uses his iPad as his voice when he wants to... if there's something he wants to eat that he can't reach, he'll look it up on the computer and point to it," said Tameka.

Tameka's talking about food triggered a hunger in young Samuel. It wasn't too long before he jumped up from the chair and head to the kitchen fridge to grab the milk and pointing for the top cabinet. Mark knew he wanted cereal.

Mark said Samuel is smarter than he's given credit. "He knows how to get into our computer and change the language. The school even tells us they have to re-program their computers because he's gotten into theirs and changed things."

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Samuel's strengths. As a result, devices like iPads are fast becoming a 'must have' for many families of children with Autism.

Lucky Tisch, Public and Community Relations manager with the Summit County Developmental Disabilities Board said the technology is an opportunity to take "a huge step forward in our understanding of Autism. They allow us to have an insight into how children think because people with Autism have a different kind of intelligence. Their memory is strong, so PC's are highly motivating."

The Williamson's would like to introduce anyone who has a child with Autism to the website they use for Samuel. www.starfall.com. This is a kindergarten curriculum website.