

UPSTART Prepares Brothers for Kindergarten, One Overcomes Speech Impediment

In addition to preparing her two sons for kindergarten, the UPSTART™ program played a major role in helping Vivien Van Leeuwen's younger son overcome a speech impediment. Both children are now ahead of their age groups developmentally and socially.

Background

Vivien Van Leeuwen, a mother of two young sons and an infant daughter, lives in the boundaries of Utah's Jordan School District. One of her children has finished the UPSTART program, while another is currently enrolled. Both have seen benefits from its use. Van Leeuwen learned about UPSTART from a friend.

Challenges and Needs

The early learning years are so important for getting children on the right track. Some preschools don't focus enough on literacy. Many children who attend preschool aren't prepared for kindergarten.

The younger of Van Leeuwen's two sons struggled to speak. When he was 18 months old, he could only grunt and groan. By age two, he had incorporated vowels into his speech, but he still couldn't use consonants or communicate effectively. He attended speech therapy, but still had a long way to go to catch up with his age group.

Van Leeuwen's older son was a whiz at math and science, but didn't enjoy reading, making it difficult to get him to participate in the activity.

Solution

Van Leeuwen learned about the UPSTART program from a friend and registered her older son. He was accepted into the program for 2013. In 2014, her younger son was also admitted.

Waterford Institute's UPSTART program uses *Waterford Early Learning*™ adaptive software, which emphasizes reading, but also includes math and science. When children use the UPSTART program, they begin with an age-appropriate assessment that determines where they are on their learning path. The software then serves up lessons at home through an individualized learning sequence. Pulling from over 7,800 activities, songs, and books, the software provides an educational experience that is unique to each learner's needs. The learning sequence is essential for comprehension and skill mastery.

Reading sessions contain games, songs, and activities designed to teach skills like letter recognition, phonics, and spelling. The sessions also include storybooks that incorporate new vocabulary words, teach listening comprehension, and provide reading practice. In many books, the software first reads to the child and then allows him or her to take a turn reading aloud to improve reading confidence.

After a reading session, the children move on to math and science. Math lessons teach number recognition, counting, and other basic math concepts. When the children are ready, the lessons move on to more challenging concepts, such as adding and subtracting. The science section includes lessons on the development of a baby chick inside an egg, volcanoes, plant life, and many other topics.



“It's too bad we can't offer [UPSTART] to everybody who wants it. It's that amazing of a program. There's a lot more that kids could be learning, and I think it really prepares them for kindergarten.”

- Vivien Van Leeuwen, mother of UPSTART participants

“I had people telling me that even a couple months ago they had no idea if he was even saying ‘hi’ to them and now they could understand him reading a long sentence.”

– Vivien Van Leeuwen, mother of UPSTART participants

ABOUT UPSTART

UPSTART—United: Preparing Students Today for A Rewarding Tomorrow—is an educational program funded by the Utah state legislature, designed and created by Waterford Institute. UPSTART uses games, songs, stories, and other fun activities to help children learn to read and get a jumpstart on math and science. UPSTART is an in-home program that prepares children to enter kindergarten.

ABOUT WATERFORD INSTITUTE

Waterford Institute is a nonprofit research center that creates personalized cloud-based instruction through award-winning curriculum and assessment for children in pre-K through 2nd grade. As a nonprofit, Waterford is uniquely focused on providing accessibility, equity, and excellence for our youngest learners to position them for a lifetime of learning and success.

Results

After using *Waterford Early Learning* 15 minutes a day every week for nearly a year, Van Leeuwen’s older son was reading months before he entered kindergarten. Today, his reading level is above average. Even though reading isn’t his first choice of activity, he reads chapter books while many of his classmates are still only able to read picture books and short books.

Van Leeuwen’s older son loved the math and science sections of UPSTART. He often wouldn’t sign off until his parents made him. He was even able to add and subtract before he entered kindergarten.

Meanwhile, as his older brother used UPSTART, Van Leeuwen’s younger son—the one who was struggling with speech difficulties—began to also benefit from the program. He didn’t have an official account yet, but started playing activities and singing along at age three. His results were dramatic.

“The children’s program at church is a perfect example of my son’s progress,” said Van Leeuwen. “Even a year ago you still didn’t really understand what he was saying. But this year, he got up, he read his part, and he read every word so clearly that everyone in that church could understand exactly what he was saying. I had people telling me that even a couple months ago they had no idea if he was even saying ‘hi’ to them and now they could understand him reading a long sentence.”

When he was three years old, Van Leeuwen’s younger son started benefiting from UPSTART by just playing

the activities and singing along with the program. He soon developed the ability to use consonants and increase his communication skills. By the age of four, when he started using his own UPSTART account, he had tested out of regular speech therapy, remaining only in the articulation class. He tested out of speech therapy completely by the age of five. His speech therapist believes UPSTART played a role in helping him improve his speech, in addition to his speech therapy sessions.

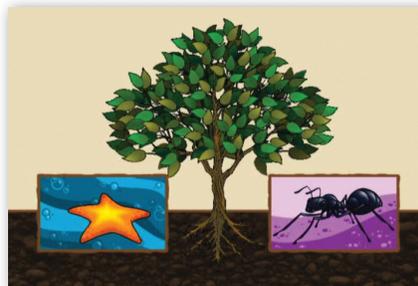
Now, he communicates effectively. Like his older brother, he is above average in reading and surpasses most of his class in comprehension.

With both boys benefitting so much from the UPSTART program, Van Leeuwen hopes the state-funded program will continue to expand to include more children and plans to enroll her daughter when she is four. Her family’s experience shows how students with different instructional needs and capabilities not only benefit from the program, but can advance to exceed the average student.

“I would most definitely recommend the UPSTART program to everyone who has young children,” Van Leeuwen said. “It’s been such an incredible program to use, and it’s been so great to watch our kids grow through using it.”

Next Steps

To learn how you can implement the UPSTART project or other early learning programs, **call toll-free 877.299.7997.**



Age-appropriate math and science activities engage children’s natural curiosity about the world around them.



With multimedia activities like “Word Birds,” children see and hear how letter sounds combine to make words—a critical step in achieving literacy.