

## *Yao's Story*

In July 2015, my husband, our then seven-year-old daughter, and I traveled to Xinzhou, China, in Shanxi Province to adopt our new son. He was two years and three months old when we brought him home from the orphanage where he'd lived his entire life. He had a cleft lip, which had been repaired in China when he was 15 months old; he hadn't been allowed to learn to walk (despite the fact there was not a gosh darn thing wrong with his legs); he'd never been fed solid food and was undernourished; he didn't speak a word of Mandarin; and throwing things was the only way he knew to play. (Note: He does have a great arm; watch out Red Sox.) Obviously, we had some obstacles to overcome, but even so, our little one had a bubbly personality, responded beautifully to love and attention, and was anxious to get to know the world outside of his crib.

As soon as we returned to the United States and recovered from jetlag, I got in touch with The Professional Center for Child Development (PCCD), which has Early Intervention programs in Lawrence and Andover, Massachusetts. I'd never needed such services before and had no idea what to expect, but friends who had used the services for their children spoke highly of the center.

The assessment took place within weeks of my call, and the team was warm, friendly, thorough, and knowledgeable. Over the past six months, we've had four ongoing services:

1. Soon after the assessment, we started working with an occupational therapist (OT) specifically on food issues. Because Yao had never eaten solid food, he needed help both learning how to eat and simply being interested in eating. In short, our OT rocks. Through a combination of professional know-how, songs, play, silliness, wisdom, experience, and great instinct, she has gained our son's trust, confidence, and affection, as well as mine.
2. We have a weekly visit at home from another staff member who works on play and movement. She comes with a bag full of interactive toys that she uses to improve social skills, communication skills, fine and gross motor skills, and more. He has gained a great deal of confidence in exploring and experimenting both with us at home and on his own. Pretty darn amazing.
3. For the past few months, we have been attending a weekly parent/child group at The Professional Center for Child Development's Andover location. There, with the guidance of our skilled group leader, he has been able to interact with children his own age in a social situation and learn how to do so in "normal" ways. Socialization in the orphanage was nonexistent, so this is a big piece of learning to be in the world.

4. After we became confident his receptive language in English was well developed, we started working with a speech therapist at the center's Lawrence location. Speech therapy is hard work for our child, especially because he didn't even have any language skills in his native Mandarin. The structure of the therapy is challenging, but, wow, it's fun to watch him get it.

Not surprisingly, all this wonderful work has moved him to a much healthier place. He's much stronger, has good muscle tone, and could probably beat a young Michael Jordan in a jumping competition.

As Mom, it's a privilege to get to do all this work with my son. After each session, I share details of what he and I did with my husband and daughter and let them know how they can help with whatever it is we're working on. Getting our son up to speed in this big, wide world has been—and will continue to be—a group effort, and we couldn't have gotten where we are today without our amazing Early Intervention team at The Professional Center for Child Development.

Kristin