

Bailey's story February 2025

Service: Makaton sessions with Jodie, Locala's Play Intervention Lead.

What is Makaton? Makaton is a language that uses symbols, signs and speech to enable people to communicate. <https://makaton.org>

Makaton helps by

- developing early communication skills such as eye contact and gestures like pointing
- developing understanding by giving a visual clue alongside speech
- reducing frustration and promoting inclusion, giving children with communication difficulties a way to express themselves independently
- stimulating sounds and first words
- encouraging language development and putting words together

Becci talked to Locala's Engagement Team about how Jodie helped her daughter Bailey.

But first, let's meet Bailey! Here she is using Makaton to sign 'more'.

This is the English version. Bailey also knows the American Makaton sign for 'more' as she has seen this on TV! She is 3 and a half and has had a tracheostomy since she was 10 months old. This is when an opening is made at the front of the neck, so a tube can be inserted into the windpipe (trachea) to help breathing. Bailey was born 8.5 weeks early and spent most of her first year in and out of hospital because of breathing difficulties caused by tracheomalacia (floppy windpipe). She also needed surgery to repair her oesophageal atresia (OA) and tracheo oesophageal fistula (TOF) – this is when the pipe that connects the mouth to the stomach hasn't developed properly.



And now, introducing Mum Becci! She describes her and Bailey's Dad as "medical parents." She says, "When Bailey came out of hospital after her tracheostomy, she was 1 year old. She couldn't sit up unaided. She was delayed, not because anything was wrong, but because of the situation she'd been in – the 'medical environment'. She'd been sedated a lot of the time and not moving around as babies are meant to. She was referred to Locala's physiotherapists and occupational therapists and was signed off after 6 months. She was referred to Jodie at first as a Play Lead, but again, Jodie signed her off, as she was age appropriate with what she was doing."



"Jodie suggested Bailey learnt Makaton. Because of how her tracheostomy was then, she couldn't talk – no babbling, no words, nothing. Being able to communicate with signing and also a communication board would mean Bailey wouldn't get frustrated. It was slow and steady at first with the Makaton. And then, this silent child was talking to us in her own way. It was great!"

"Jodie tailored the choice of Makaton signs for Bailey. Bailey can get anxious and cry and cling to me. Jodie let her play with toys to settle her – all the team at Locala were good at this. She taught her animal signs and 'more' and when she needed a drink. A communication board helped too. As Bailey has grown, she's now got a quiet voice. The 'air leak' around her tube allows air to pass over her vocal chords and she can say 3 or 4 words on 1 breath, then takes her time. So she's using the Makaton less often now. But it filled a gap. We wouldn't be where we are today without Jodie – all that time and effort helping us!"

Makaton sessions: All Locala's therapists working with children know some Makaton signs. Jodie has had additional training with a Makaton tutor and uses her enhanced skills to support her colleagues and help raise awareness. She runs the Makaton sessions with patients and families who have been put forward by Locala's Speech and Language therapists.

Becci spoke with Jo from Locala's Engagement Team on 28.1.25 and gives consent to share Bailey's story widely.