

Holland Bloorview

Kids Rehabilitation Hospital

Idika's Story

As one of five siblings in his family, 15-year-old Idika Theodore Njoku likes to stay active. He loves playing sports, especially basketball, as well as going for walks and playing on his Wii games such as 3-on-3 basketball, table tennis return (the record holder in the family beating out Dad), swordplay and 100-pin bowling and archery.

Since being diagnosed with autism at the age of three, Idika's mom, Anthea Charles, has been working tirelessly with her son's schools and health care teams to access the care and services he needs to help manage his increasingly challenging, unpredictable behaviours, finding the right balance of medications as well as supporting his verbal communication skills. He was non-verbal till the age of 7; he started answering questions with 1 word at the age of 9. He started speaking in simple sentences at the age of 13. His language skills are still developing, they are currently that of a 4-year-old. He has always understood instructions and what people say to him.

Idika's parents enrolled him in a full-time intensive behavioural program when he was a child to help him learn to adapt to the world around him. But his behaviours continued to be a source of worry to his parents. Anthea was also concerned about his tendencies to run away from school. When he felt overwhelmed, she saw that he would have a great deal of difficulty expressing what was bothering him due to his lack of verbal skills.

When Idika hit puberty at 15, his behaviour changed in ways that his parents could not anticipate anymore. He became aggressive by banging on cars with various parts of his body and being very destructive at home. If he was at school, his behaviour became unpredictable. There would be days where he would start off feeling good, but then his emotions would change drastically as the day wore on. He would also leave the school property and wander to other places for unknown reasons or because he was triggered by something. Some days, he refused to attend school. On the days he wanted to go to school, he did not want to take the school bus. However, this was resolved when he was able to ride the school bus by himself.

Idika's parents turned to an urgent response service in Toronto for guidance on how Idika can reduce his unpredictable behaviour, but at the end of the program, there still wasn't enough time to address all of the teen's complex behaviours and needs. Additionally, the family didn't have any disposable income for Idika to access autism programs to support him through his childhood after he was seven years old.

At 15, Idika was referred to Holland Bloorview's Extensive Needs Service program in July 2023, by his psychopharmacology care team at Holland Bloorview. His parents noticed a significant difference almost immediately. Idika became more communicative and flexible as well as being more patient. School staff, who all know Idika, have also seen and were impressed by these changes. He's also attending his Grade 10 classes every day.

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Anthea and her husband, Njoku, are relieved and pleased with the changes they have seen in their son in just three months. They know that it will take some time but feel confident that many of the issues that prevented Idika from connecting with anyone outside his immediate family or going on outings will be resolved eventually. They know that with this program Idika's life trajectory will drastically change for the better.

Quote: "This program is an answer to my prayers. I feel like I'm getting my son back. I can't thank the program staff enough for how they've helped my son so much." – **Anthea Charles, Idika's mom**