

THE AJ FOUNDATION

November 2012 Newsletter



FIRST WORDS.....

Like many parents of a young child with Autism I desperately wanted to hear my child speak, say something ANYTHING. I waited for what seemed like an eternity to hear my son's voice.

Oddly enough my son's first words were not spoken.

When my son was four he was beginning to show signs of understanding words. Often he would just lead me to things he wanted, mostly food. The only sounds he made were the ones professionals told us not to allow him to express-screeching paired with flapping.

Lucas. My beautiful child. Then, my only child. The early years of living with Autism are so stressful and uncertain. It feels like everything important hinges on speech. I now know that's not true. I know fantastic non verbal children with Autism that have many skills and gifts. I foolishly thought if my child can speak even just to express his wants and needs then we've made it. We are in the Good Autism group, silly but true at the time.

It was a typical day in our mundane routine. I was in our basement cleaning up the toys. As I picked up colorful alphabet magnets I was reminded

of a Stephen King novel I was currently reading called "Bag of Bone's." Scary morbid messages are sent to the main character in the book by way of colorful plastic alphabet letters. I must admit I don't scare easily but Mr. King was doing a magnificent job of disrupting my already limited sleep.

Like most mom's of children with Autism I would buy a million toys in vain, waiting to see if we picked the "magic one." I was hoping Luke would use the toy for it's intended purpose rather than raiding the silverware drawer and methodically lining spoons up, and placing them oh so carefully in the sofa cushions so they stood exactly at a 90 degree angle. There was hell to pay if those sofa toys moved. Lucas was very connected to his Buzz Lightyear but unfortunately I consistently found Buzz Lightyear 'sleeping' in my underwear drawer.

In desperation I painted one of our basement walls with magnetic paint and bought hoards of those perky magnetic alphabet letters. Letters make words. Words make sentences. Sentences mean communication. They seemed

hopeful, unfortunately most days I would just pick them up from a big pile on the floor. Not today. Today was different!

I was on my hands and knees grabbing arbitrary letters and out of the corner of my eye I spot something unusual. It was a word. An actual word. It said...PIXAR. I look around to see if Stephen King is in the room, a chill runs down my spine. Who did this? Lucas can't read, write, or even speak. No one else is home except myself, Luke, and the magnet author who is clearly going to jump out from behind my sofa and kill me by way of Pixar motif.

I'm terrified, I dump the letters and run upstairs for my life. I scan the room, status quo, just Luke flapping and screeching to the television.

I grab my "evil" book and bury it in the laundry. I sit with Lucas and watch his preschool show. I ignore the entire incident and allow my brain to glaze over to the monotonous repetitive genre that is preschool television.



Lucas
Pixar Studios

Lunch was approaching, we ate and afterwards I return to my normal gig. I did some laundry, futilely attempt to engage Lucas, and go about cleaning some more. My mind returns to the letters. It must be my husband, he read the book before me. That's completely rational, a grown man playing with alphabet letters on the floor of our basement. Why not?

Hours pass and I run down to the basement again to grab something. There it is again.....PIXAR. I start to breathe heavily, I grab the letters and run upstairs. I hand the letters to Lucas, "Lucas spell Pixar." In a split

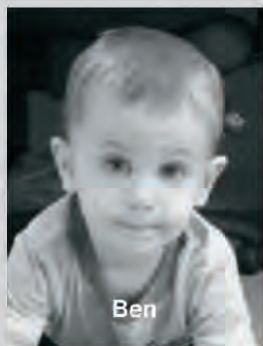
second my non verbal four year old son arranged the letters perfectly. PIXAR. There it was my son just spoke to me. His voice sings in my ears. Lucas flaps and runs away, and I sit next to those beautiful letters and cry. I touch each one and thank them individually for showing me my real son.

My son can magically read and spell without my awareness. I want to stay here forever. Super glue the letters to the floor, call MOMA and demand they recognize this as the purest most magnificent piece of art they have or would ever witness. Instead I jump up, I madly reach in a crowded cabinet to find my camera, I must document this.

I run back to the letters and just as I snap the picture my son flaps in the edge of the frame. Pixar and flapping feet....perfection.

My son is in there, he is in there and can do extraordinary things without my help. I am completely humbled by this realization and promise myself never to underestimate his capabilities based on criteria handed down by the ages.

Instead much like my son watched his beloved Pixar movies I sit silently on the floor and watch him. I suddenly feel tired by the excitement and lay on the floor, head surrounded by letters, heart full of hope.



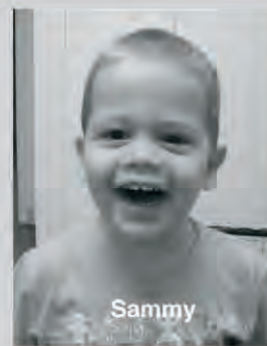
Ben

The preschool years are crucial in the life of a child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Research has shown that if intensive early intervention is provided to young children with ASD the average IQ gain is nearly seventeen points and the long-term cost of care can be reduced by two thirds. The Comprehensive Learning Center offers an intensive educational program utilizing the principles of applied behavior analysis to children as young as two years and seven months. In July, CLC welcomed two new preschoolers, Ben and Sammy. The progress these two young learners are making already is tremendous!

CLC offers an intensive, full day educational program utilizing one to one instruction for our preschool learners. The school day is spent learning skills in many areas such as learning readiness, social skills, receptive and expressive language, self care, and recreation. Integral to CLC's preschool program is the

weekly home visit. The CLC teachers work with each preschool student and their family to reinforce the skills learned at school.

In their short time at CLC, Ben and Sammy have learned to look into the eyes of the people that are interacting with them. They have learned to play appropriately with toys and puzzles using activity schedules. Sammy is independently using pictures and scripts to request items and activities at home. Ben is answering social questions about himself and his family. Both boys are learning to get dressed and to use utensils properly during meal times. Their parents are ecstatic about their progress. When asked to describe the impact CLC has had on their families, Sammy's mother Marcia said, "We now know that our son's future is bright and anything is possible with the great care from CLC. CLC is just not a school, it is a provider of hope for our family." Ben's mother Michelle said, "My



Sammy

husband and I are grateful to have the incredibly skilled teachers and trainers who listen to our concerns, answer our questions, and give us the tools to help us feel confident as we negotiate the ups and downs of parenting a child with Autism."

There is no question that an intensive education program during the early years of child with ASD's life is critical. Intensive programming such as CLC's is often costly and unfortunately funding for young learners does not come easily. Families not only have the day to day stress of autism to cope with but funding the education program that they know to be critical is another huge burden.

Through the fundraising efforts of The AJ Foundation, CLC can continue to provide quality services to our youngest learners. Your continued support has made a profound difference. For more information on ways you can help please visit www.ajfoundation.org. Your generosity is 100% tax deductible and appreciated!

"If they can't learn the way we teach, we will teach the way they learn."

Ivar Lovaas

MODULE 'B'

Life after Preschool.....

Module 'B' children were introduced to the core elements of learning in preschool, sitting, listening, and following directions. Now it's time to take that experience and build upward.

What else happens in Module 'B'?

This is an age where substantial growth occurs. We maximize this by individualizing tools, resources, and programming. Every child is unique, different, and waiting for the opportunity to show us what they are made of.....here are some stories our parents shared regarding their children's 'firsts'.



Brian and Sean S

"The big thing that happened for our boys this past spring was Brian and Sean received their First Holy Communion this year. The prep time took 9 months. The teachers helped them practice how to bless themselves, to receive the host, and to tolerate sitting for a lengthy time. They were successful and received their First Holy Communion on May 5th!"

Michele S- Brian & Sean's Mom

Ethan P

"Ethan recently learned how to ride a bike, that in itself was highly emotional. Watching Ethan beaming as he rode his bike in the street with the other neighborhood kids for the first time was priceless!"

Erika P-Ethan's Mom



John M

"This year for the first time John initiated communication with us! CLC taught him to use a recorder with a button on it that says 'snack.' John approaches us with the recorder, presses the button and hands it to us, all while making great eye contact. He then gets his snack. The first time he did this I practically cried, it was so awesome!"

Mary Kim-John's Mom



Bryn B

"What really brought happiness to our family this year was when Bryn became friends with Julia at school. Julia was Bryn's first girlfriend, and friend. We saw video of the girls playing games, taking turns, and together on the swing sets. The teachers tell us the girls hold hands when they go outside to play. We believe interacting and socializing is a great first for our Bryn."

Gregg & Joann-Bryn's Dad & Mom



Connor B

"Connor started using a fork independently for the first time. It's a beautiful thing!"

Connors instructors taught him how to eat pizza so now we can eat pizza together as a family.

This past year was also the first time Connor spoke in a full sentence. This year we are full of firsts! "

Camille B-Connor's Mom



Julia B

"Julia had many firsts this past year. She is now able to communicate her need for food, drink, and potty. This was a huge accomplishment for us!"

Julia also said 'Mom' when she needed my help. This was so exciting for me!"

Stacy B-Julia's Mom

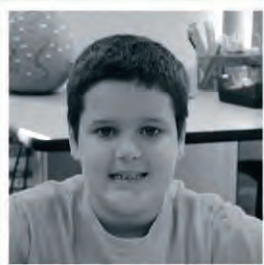
MODULE 'C'

Working Together....

Module 'C' students are at an interesting age. Many are transitioning from grade school age to the teenage years! This in itself can be challenging.

What else happens in Module 'C'?

Many of our students are participating in small group instruction. Science, Math, & Vocabulary are just some of the subjects our diverse group is enjoying.



Jack J

"This summer Jack's little brother Brady came home with a large summer "read to yourself" or "have someone read it to you" book list. At one point Jack picked up a book and said "Here Brady, I'll read to you" they sat shoulder to shoulder, big brother reading to his little brother. It was a sweet gesture and I loved watching it!"

Diane J-Jack's Mom



Drake P

"After months of training, Drake can now play Happy Birthday on his Greek Bouzouki!"

Maria P-Drake's Mom

Brandon S



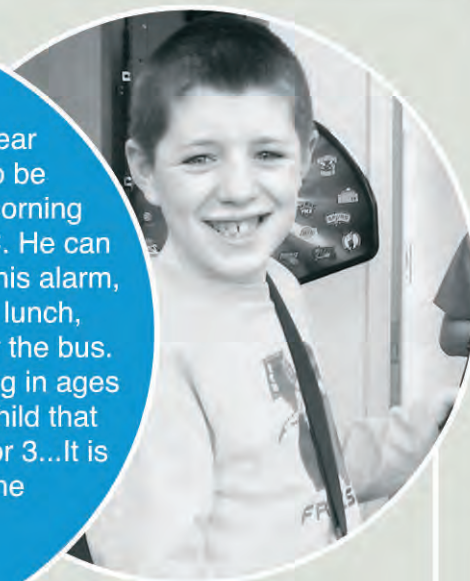
"Brandon returned to CLC in January. There are two moments that have been amazing. The first was when he learned how to ride a bike without his training wheels. The second moment was when he asked to play with a friend! These examples are things we just assume are going to happen in a child's life but for us we know hard work made this happen!"

Sherrie S-Brandon's Mom

Patrick L

"This will be Patrick's third year at CLC. Patrick has learned to be independent with his weekday morning routine because of the staff at CLC. He can follow his schedule from waking to his alarm, getting fully dressed, making his lunch, brushing his teeth and be ready for the bus. Patrick is 1 of our 7 children ranging in ages from 10 to 21 and he is my only child that doesn't need a wake up call, or 2 or 3...It is a pleasure to watch him in the morning!"

Karen L-Pat's Mom



"This spring Madison had her first complete dental exam including x rays and full cleaning. This was so exciting because for years we had to have that done under anesthesia. The help of a wonderful team including hygienist Sherri S, (also a CLC parent) we were able to do this with her just sitting perfectly in the chair!"

Judy K-Madison's Mom

Madison K



Tony

"Tony joined Module C in October and is already making great progress! He is learning many academic and social skills including seeking out his peers and maintaining a topical conversation."

Rachel M-CLC Trainer



Michael W

"Michael has been in a Fit Life Program weekly. Recently he completed an obstacle course independently. We were so proud we took a video of it on Dad's phone.

We share the video every chance we get to show what a major feat this was for Michael to achieve!"

Michelle W-Michael's Mom

MODULE 'D'

Out in the Community.

Module 'D' students are experiencing work and community for the first time.

Many of our students are learning to shop, participating in important family events, and working their first job

Connor F



"Connor started working at Giant Food Store this year. It is his first job and he LOVES it. He is often saying he wants more work time and less school time! It is with CLC's support that Connor has enjoyed this great opportunity."

Patty F-Connor's Mom



Remi W

"Something that made us smile this summer was when we were out to dinner one night with Remi and my two other children, Remi picked up a glass of water, motioned for all of us to pick our drinks up and shouted 'cheers!'"

Elise W-Remi's Mom

Ryan Q

I could not be more pleased with Ryan's "Firsts". Ryan now goes to church with me every Sunday. It is now part of his "home schedule" and he actually instigates our going to Mass. As an Irish Catholic with a long standing tradition of going to Church each week, this has brought me much joy and satisfaction. I never thought I would see the day when Ryan could sit still for an hour without causing a scene. He now even says some of his prayers and his "All Done" outbursts are few and far between. The other parishioners have embraced Ryan and I sense that he is teaching many to become more tolerant and inclusive of those considered "not typical."

Tim Q-Ryan's Dad



Ivy C

"A recent first for Ivy was making a real 911 call while at CLC for a student having a seizure.

The teacher told us that Ivy didn't panic and was able to provide the necessary information to the dispatcher. We couldn't have been prouder.

Our children can really surprise you!

Gerald C-Ivy's Dad



Colin M

"Colin is shaving for the first time, with the support of school and home but nonetheless!

He is definitely a teenager with an appetite like nothing we have ever seen and an attitude to boot! He's also very good now at telling us what he DOESN'T want! That's a first! That part of his development is right on track!"

Elsie M-Colin's Mom



Will B

"This summer we had an interesting experience during our family vacation where we have gone for the past 12 years.

At the end of our two weeks an elderly woman who always chose to sit a few feet away from our families sprawl of umbrellas approached us and said,

"I hope you won't think that I am rude for staring at you all this time, but I've been sitting on this section of the beach ever since you've been coming here and I just want to tell you how impressed I am with the improvements your son has made this past year. He is so

much more "with it" and so much more attentive to his family. He seems so happy now."

Of course this left us all teary eyed and reminded ourselves of how far Will has come!"

Kristin B-Will's Mom

Let's Get to Work!

Module 'E' students are out in the world working, going to the gym, ordering food in restaurants, and establishing their place in the community.

Many of our students are working in new jobs and are doing tremendously well. These young adults are making us proud. Congratulations to our students and families.

Connor M



"Connor started shaving independently this year. It took a very long time to get there but now doing it all on his own!"

At 17, Connor has begun job sampling to prepare for work as an adult. He just began working three days a week at a local gym cleaning the equipment. He has also learned to shelve fiction books to prepare for a job at the public library. He has learned to do bulk mail, file and use a copier. He uses a chore chart at home to rotate his home helping chores: folding laundry, swiffing, emptying/relining all the trash cans, sorting the recyclables, dusting, cleaning the mirrors, and watering the plants. He enjoys working but his favorite activity is attending the teen special needs dances at Truman High School."

Judy M-Connor's Mom

Louis E

"Louis has been using the iPad to express what he wants to do. He is currently using the iPad 'Proloquo' program to order meals in a restaurant. Language is very hard for Louis this technology is making a huge difference in helping us understand what he desires and has created some genuine surprises for us all!"

Gloria E - Louis' Mom



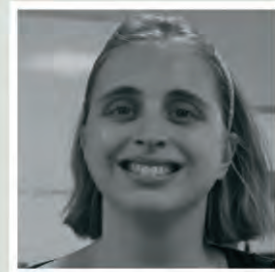
Dan L

"Words cannot describe how proud we were to see Dan in his Giant uniform for the first time. He takes great pride in his work and his professional appearance.

He has learned so much while working in the community and we look forward to the surprises he will bring in the future. We are so happy for him!"

Sandie L-Dan's Mom

Alexis P



"We were very excited when Alexis landed her first job at Maggio's Restaurant. It was something we had thought at one time was not possible.

With training and hard work CLC made it possible.

Way to go Alexis!"

Georgia P-Alexis's Mom



AJ

'AJ is doing tremendously well with his jobs. During the first week of work he was able to get himself ready, lock the door, and get the bus for work.

He saved his money to make his first big purchase-a new bed and some video games.

AJ is still running and placed second in his age group for his first 5K.

Also during his first year of work he attended the holiday party with a date!

We are so proud of his accomplishments and the man he has become!"

Joanne C-AJ's Mom



AJ

2012 - 2013 EVENTS



AJ 10K 5K Run for Autism



Join us.....

Texas Hold'em
January 26, 2013

Casino Night
April 13, 2013

AJ10k, 5K Run For
Autism:
May/June 2013

Upcoming Events...

The AJ Foundation's mission is to implement and support quality educational services dedicated to improving the lives of children with Autism. We conduct fundraising activities to support our private school, The Comprehensive Learning Center and also to meet the growing needs of the autistic population in our community. All donations are tax deductible.

Back by popular demand we present our Texas Hold 'Em at Giuseppe's in Richboro. Save the date: January 26, 2013! Pre-register before and get \$2,000 in additional chips! This event fills up quickly so please check our website for up to date information on prizes, rules, and how to join in the fun.

Casino Night is April 13, 2013. This is a hugely popular event. Over \$30,000 in prizes that you can win. Good food, drink, and games. Pre register and save money on your admission. Look forward to seeing you there!

AJ 10K, 5K Run for Autism will be held in May or June 2013. Our Annual Run will be held at Peace Valley Park in Chalfont, PA. This is scenic run to support a wonderful cause. As this event grows we are happy to share that many of our students are participating and training for the big event. Please check www.ajfoundation.org for more information.

This years winners of
the
AJF Ride 4 Autism
Team Blackthorn!



For information or to make a donation:

The AJ Foundation

For Children With Autism

P.O. Box 234

Wycombe, PA 18980



On October 13, 2012, The AJ Foundation held it's 5th Annual Bike Ride 4 Autism. The ride hosted our **usual 12 Mile Family Ride** along with our **challenging 50 Mile Ride**. **This year we added the 75 Mile Ride**, a new adventure for our most skilled riders!!! All rides took advantage of the winding paths and hills of beautiful Bucks County. We are excited to report that not only did we have a record amount of riders (over 150) we also raised over \$40,000 which is the most raised for this event. We would like to thank all of our riders, sponsors, and volunteers!! A special nod goes to our event sponsors Cognizant Technologies, Giuseppe's Family Restaurant, Tanner Brothers, Cramer's Bakery, Bicycle Pro, Glazing Concepts, First Federal of Bucks County, and Bike Works. A special thanks and congratulations goes to Team Blackthorn for winning the AJF Ride 4 Autism Cup by raising over \$6,000 for The AJ Foundation!!! A close second by Team Carosi followed by Team Julia!!!! We look forward to seeing everyone next October!!



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