

## Meet Hayden



The other day, Hayden Kouhopt was in Kara St. Hilaire's office, and she ate her apple.

Now every time Hayden sees Kara, the Special Education Coordinator, she will say "I stole Kara's apple" and she will laugh.

A year ago, Hayden would not have even noticed Kara walking by.

Hayden, 3, has autism. When she started coming to the Children's Center, she only spoke a few words – and they were either unintelligible or scripted.

Hayden also would often become over-stimulated and throw herself to the floor, roll around and cry – anywhere from an hour to three hours.

"She never initiated any social interactions with anybody," said Kara. "She would play alone, and she would leave the area if anyone approached her."

Kara said Hayden has done a 180 when it comes to socializing—and loves to be around people now.

Hayden has switched from being in the Autism Program classroom for the full day to now going into the inclusive pre-school classroom with typically developing children for half of the day.

Hayden's communication skills have also increased. "You can clearly hear and un-



derstand her. She is able to describe feelings and experiences," said Kara.

Hayden's mom, Tina, said when her daughter was first diagnosed at 2-years-old it was really tough.

"We hated the fact that despite our best efforts, we were not able to effectively communicate with her," she said.

That all changed once she was diagnosed and starting going to the Children's Center.

"Hayden will be four on April 12<sup>th</sup> and I am so happy to say that she's a completely different kid," said

Tina. "We are so fortunate to have found the Children's Center and are very, very grateful for all they have done for her."

## Catching up with Patrick

When Patrick came to the Children's Center at 2-years-old, he barely spoke and he wasn't interested in other people.



By the time he was six-years-old and graduating from the Autism Program, he was

talking a lot. "He was using huge words – words I wouldn't even use," said his mom, Chasity Sidelinger. She said her son had really come out of his shell.

Now, at 10-years-old, Patrick is in the fourth grade at Lincoln Elementary School in Augusta.

"He is in the inclusive classroom ninety-eight percent of the time. He has an Ed-tech that sits with him off to the side and if he needs help, he goes to see her," said Chasity.

Chasity said if it wasn't for the Children's Center, she's not sure if her son would have been able to attend Lincoln School.

"It's a perfect fit for him," she said. "He's doing multiplication. He's doing long division. He's doing fractions. He is getting one hundreds on his spelling tests. He has

friends that play with him at recess."

Chasity said she has the Children's Center to thank for Patrick's progress and success today. She recommends them to anyone



who needs similar services as her son.

"I never met one person that gave me the feeling that they weren't there to help my child get as far as he could get," she said. "And I can't thank them enough. They are an amazing group of people."

## Autism Program

Our specialized program for children with autism occurs within the “Stepping Stones” Classrooms in Augusta and “Oak” Classroom in Skowhegan. Each child works with an individual specialized instructor toward obtaining his or her goals.



The program focuses on increased independence in the areas of communication, social skills, play, and self-care, while preparing each child for a less restrictive environment and transition to public school.

There are currently 19 children in the Stepping Stones and Oak Classrooms.

“What makes our program special is that it is individualized. A child might need a specific visual support. She or he might need a different way to do activities – or need an alternative way to communicate,” said Special Education Coordinator Kara St. Hilaire, who oversees the Autism Program. “And because she or he has that direct care support, we are able to individualize the child’s program to meet his or her individual needs.”

Kara said the program’s staff runs through a schedule for the children that is the same every day for consistency, and they provide peer interaction as well, especially on the playground.

The Autism Program is set up on a tier in Augusta due to program size. Stepping Stones I is typically for children who recently received an autism diagnosis. These children are usually two to three years old



and have baseline skills in the areas of communication, social skills, and personal independence. From here, they move up the ladder.

Children are ready to transition to Stepping Stones II when they have developed a way to functionally communicate their wants and needs through requesting, protesting, and making choices.

They also have increased social skills as well as independence during meal times and self care routines.

Stepping Stones III is the last step in the Autism Program. Children that transition into this room begin to spend part of their day in an inclusive setting. They may use this room if they are having a difficult time in a specific area or during a certain time of the day.

Upon graduation, the Autism Program will have helped these children gain independence and achieve the skills needed to be successful in a mainstream public school.

## Playground

Playgrounds provide much more than a chance to release energy for young children. A well designed playground provides children with opportunities to develop gross motor skills, coordination, social



skills, and their imagination. A play area should give children a chance to explore their curiosity while still feeling and remaining safe.

The Children’s Center is in need of a more



equipped playground for children of all abilities as we experience new needs.

For children with autism, new equipment would better benefit their specific needs.

Kara St. Hilaire says children with autism often have difficulty in social settings, and being outside can be especially overwhelming. It can be over-stimulating with all of the children running around, combined with different sights, smells, sounds and textures that are associated with the outdoors.

“The most important benefit of having a

well-equipped playground for children with autism is having specific equipment available to help address a child’s individual sensory needs as well as specific interest while creating an inclusive setting for peers of all abilities,” said St. Hilaire.

Specific equipment needed for children in the autism program include: a tire swing (inclusive for multiple children), new water table, tactile/musical activity wall, see-through tunnel, nature play (tree trunk, stepping stones, branch tunnel, etc.) and new inclusive structures.





# 2016 Children's Center Chili Chowder Challenge

Saturday, March 26, 2016

11:00 am - 2:00 pm

Augusta State Armory on Western Avenue

Tickets: \$10 / Individual & \$25 / Family

Children 11 and under are FREE!

*Tickets are available at the door and at the Children's Center.*

### PARTICIPATING RESTAURANTS/ CATERERS:

Augusta House of Pancakes ~ Aunt Gin's ~ Brews 'N' Views ~ Le Club Calumet ~ The Liberal Cup  
Cohen on the Meadows/Spectrum Generations ~ Damon's ~ Ground Round Sports Grille ~ Red Robin  
Lisa's Restaurant & Lounge ~ Maple Hill Farm Inn & Conference Center ~ Red Barn ~ Vickery Café

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SPECIAL THANK YOU TO:



## General Updates

- Opened a Behavioral Support Classroom in Gardiner November 30, 2015
- Hired a new clinician, Denise Gianini, to support the growing Behavioral Support Programs on January 25, 2016
- Hired a Communication Specialist to oversee the use of effective communication at all locations, including visuals and Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) on January 25, 2016
- Unified all classrooms of all programs at the Children's Center through the Creative Curriculum in Summer 2015
- Increased family supports for children receiving services at the Children's Center, particularly for children participating in the Behavioral Support Program, through outpatient and family therapy in Fall 2015



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