

Children's Center News

Winter 2019



Meet Gavin

Gavin Gray has attended the Children's Center for over two years. Most describe him as a social butterfly who can light up a room with his happy smile and carefree personality. He has come a long way over the past two years.

Gavin's parents, Andy and Jessica Gray, noticed early on that their son did not engage with them as much as their older children did as infants. When he began missing typical milestones related to communication, they sought help from their pediatrician who referred him to Child Development Services.

After participating in a psychological evaluation when he was two years old, Gavin was diagnosed with autism. Shortly after, his parents referred him for early interven-

tion and case management at the Children's Center.

Brandin Turner, targeted case manager, began working with the family to enroll Gavin into needed services at the Children's Center. It was not long before he began participating in the autism program as well as receiving occupational and speech and language therapy.

"Gavin was almost completely nonverbal and had no



sense of safety. He was difficult to take into public because of his behaviors and tantrums. He was always frustrated," said Jessica. "He knew what he wanted but did not have a way to show it, which led to a lot of tantrums," said Andy.

Gavin stayed mostly in his own world, speaking mostly gibberish but to no one in particular and playing but without including anyone else said Hannah Mountain, Gavin's behavioral health professional.

He had a hard time both understanding language and following directions as well as articulating his own wants and needs so that others could understand him, said Kara St. Hilaire, autism program supervisor.

Gavin has a "beautiful mind" that requires unique and creative methods of teaching said Hannah. He learns through a great deal of repetition and associations to retain the information. He learned his letters but only through associations with animals and his numbers but only in combination with colors.

Fast forward two years later, Gavin can now understand and follow directions, communicate with others, and



create meaningful connections with his peers and adults alike. He not only acknowledges other children around him but seeks them out to play.

Over the past two years, he has graduated from full day

in our beginner level autism program to part day in the highest functioning autism classroom and part day in an inclusive preschool setting.

"The Children's Center has given him so much support. This program has given him all the tools he needs going into to grade school. He has grown so much in the last two years. He is exceeding all of our expectations," said Jessica.

Gavin will be more than ready for kindergarten in the fall. He is definitely a poster child for the impact early intervention and family support services can have for children with autism said Kara.

"The Children's Center is just such an amazing place! I am so appreciative of all the wonderful staff. They are all so good at what they do with kids. They are so great with Gavin and have made a world of difference in his life. We will forever be grateful," said Jessica.



Catching Up With Caleb

Caleb Cosand attended the Children's Center almost ten years ago but his parents said that they will be forever grateful for the incredible support and strong foundation that he received here.

By the time he was two years old, Caleb was not talking at all said his mother, Angi Cosand. She said he did not make eye contact or play with peers. She said that he had many overreactions and tantrums because he felt overwhelmed by too much sensory input. Even feeding became a challenge due to many food aversions.

After discussing concerns with his pediatrician and further evaluation, Caleb was diagnosed with autism. He began receiving in-home early intervention services through Child Development Services.

Caleb had just turned three when he started at the Children's Center said Angi. He began receiving developmental therapy, occupational therapy, and targeted case management as well as sequential oral sensory therapy to assist with feeding issues.

According to his mother, Caleb struggled when he first began services. Staff worked with him and his family to assist with the transition. They actually created a separate, smaller classroom for Caleb and other children who needed specialized accom-

modations, such as one-on-one support and an environment with less sensory input. This classroom would later evolve into one of three classrooms in the current autism program.

"It was nice to have everything in one building for Caleb. We could check in with his teacher, therapists, and case manager without having to leave the building.



modations, such as one-on-one support and an environment with less sensory input. This classroom would later evolve into one of three classrooms in the current autism program.

"The teachers and therapists even allowed me to observe in the classroom in order to learn strategies to practice in our home. They gave us the tools to use at home to be able to help Caleb reach his goals even faster," said his mother.

"The Children's Center created an amazing community

and support system for my family that continued well into the public school system," said Angi. She still connects with parents she met from the Center.

By the time Caleb left the Children's Center, he was able to communicate verbally, interact with his peers and teachers, and made huge gains with his eating aversions said his mother.

"The Children's Center allowed Caleb the space to be himself, gain stability, and ground himself in order to be able to target specific behaviors as well as develop language, attention, and pre-learning skills necessary for success later in life," said Sam Thibodeau, his targeted case manager.

Now fourteen years old, Angi said that Caleb excels in

music, playing guitar, ukulele, and singing at open mic nights and at his family church. He is even learning to play the piano. He loves to cook and learn kitchen safety. He has also harnessed the challenges he faces surrounding food anxiety by creating his own blog: Caleb Dives In (<https://calebdivesin.home.blog/>). "I really started the whole insane project in order to help people with food anxiety. I thought it would be fun," Caleb said.

Caleb receives special education through Maine Connections Academy said Sam. He said he still has a hard time focusing on things for too long, so this online charter school allows him the flexibility to succeed. Sam said he mostly keeps up with his peers and gets together with them for field trips and other social opportunities. He even made student of the month.

Caleb still struggles with situations involving a lot of noises or big crowds. But that does not stop him from going out and pursuing his dreams to become a musician and YouTuber.

"When you hear the diagnosis autism, you feel overwhelmed with grief. You do not know what that will mean for your little boy. If he had not received early intervention services through the Children's Center, he would not be where he is today," said Angi.

Staff Spotlight: Tammy Guertin

Tammy Guertin has been involved with the Children's Center since 2005. She said she began here because she has a passion for children and giving them the opportunity to learn, grow, develop, and have fun while doing it.

Since earning her associates degree in early childhood education, Tammy has also acquired her educational technician and behavioral health professional certification.

Tammy said she began as the lead teacher in the inclusive, preschool program. Today, Tammy has taken the role of lead teacher in Stepping Stones II, the beginner level classroom as far as communication and socialization in the autism program, said Kara St. Hilaire, autism program supervisor.

"Tammy has a deep understanding of child development. She is super knowledgeable about milestones for typically developing children, which gives her a strong frame of reference for children with special needs," said Kara.

Tammy said she finds that the most rewarding part of her job has always been

the opportunity to see the progress that the children can make in such a short period of time. "It makes me happy knowing I played a role in their success," she said.

"Tammy's genuine passion for every single child in the autism program is insurmountable," said Kara.

She said that "Tammy is always willing to help out with whatever needs to be done. She goes above and beyond not just for the autism program but for the Children's Center as a whole."



Champions of the Center

Charlie and Nancy Shuman, their family, and their business have outdone themselves yet again for the Children's Center.

They remain our lead sponsor for the 18th Annual Chili Chowder Challenge through donations made



both personally and through their local, family owned business, Charlie's Family of Dealerships. All proceeds from the event will go directly towards supporting programs for young children with disabilities and their families.

Whether through donations of toys and clothes or major contributions towards vehicles and playground renovations, the entire family has been huge supporters of the organization for many years in a number of ways.

We cannot thank you enough for your ongoing support. We truly appreciate your generosity to the center and the community as a whole. You are making an enormous difference, especially in the lives of young children with special needs.

18th Annual
Chili Chowder Challenge
Saturday, March 23, 2019
11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Augusta State Armory

Tickets: Adult (18+): \$10.00 Youth (12-17): \$5.00 Children (0-11): FREE
Tickets available at the door and online at www.childrensctr.org

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- Ye Olde English Fish & Chips

Live Music by the Scolded Dogs

Family-friendly fun for all ages!
 Taste and vote for best chili and chowder from local restaurants.

Children's Activities
 Silent Auction
 FREE Snack Bar
 (Hotdogs, chips, ice cream, drinks, etc.)

OPEN TO ALL!
All proceeds go to benefit the



General Updates

We continue to have children on waiting lists and continue to have cramped quarters for kids and staff that are at our Augusta site. That's been our situation for years and the time has finally come to build additional space.

That's exciting for all of us — to provide much needed services in an addition to our Augusta building. To reach that goal, we are now involved in a feasibility study. The study will complete in May with a floor plan, an estimate of the cost to build it, and goals for a capital campaign to raise the money for it to happen.

Not only will this new addition provide services to children under its roof, but we'll be able to provide services to children in other communities where services aren't available. We'll do that through technology using a telehealth platform. Parent education, evaluations, speech and language therapy, mental health therapy, and consultation with other providers will all be possible through this new space. We can't wait to make it happen.

Jeff Johnson, Executive Director



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