



Preparing for the Unexpected and Learning Along the Way



A FAMILY'S STORY

As parents, we thought we had fully prepared for Semaj's birth. We selected his name when I was 5 months pregnant. His crib and baby equipment were assembled weeks before my due date. I had even ironed and neatly packed the outfit he was going to wear home. Our intentions were good and we thought we had prepared for everything, but the one thing we did not plan for was the possibility of Semaj being diagnosed with autism.

I can remember the day he was born. It was 5:11 pm on September 14, 2003. I felt as if I had just been chosen for the most important job of my life, being a mother. Following his birth he reached developmental milestones just as his peers. He turned over back and forth at two months old, began eating solid foods at four months, and was responsive to his name and those around him. Semaj was generally easy to care for. But, when he was nine months we noticed that he was not crawling and did not seem interested in other babies. As a mother, I thought these behaviors were odd but was reassured by his pediatrician that that he would probably begin crawling when the time was right. His first birthday came and though he was not crawling, he could move around our home with assistance. He was also using a few words that we could recognize such as mommy, daddy and bye-bye.

At fourteen months, I again became concerned with his development because he was still not walking. When Semaj turned eighteen months his doctor became concerned about his speech. Suddenly, he was not talking as clearly and was not putting words together. He received a speech evaluation and it was recommended that we have him evaluated at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. It was there that we got his diagnosis, Semaj has autism. My husband and I could not believe what we were hearing about our child. We thought we had provided him with the appropriate stimulation and experiences, and gave him the care and attention he deserved. We were referred to the

Center for Autism for a second opinion, which is what we did. We contacted them for more information about his diagnosis and were scheduled for an evaluation. The Center provided us with detailed information regarding his diagnosis and information on what services they could provide. Semaj entered the preschool-aged program and began treatment in September 2006.

When Semaj first started to attend the Center, he exhibited behaviors of excessive drooling, mouthing objects, poor eye contact, not interacting with his peers or adults and he was not saying words that could be understood. But, he has been at the Center

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for over two years now, and is verbally expressing his wants and needs, is more aware of his surroundings, makes more eye contact, can follow simple directions and can communicate using PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System). I believe that the Center has changed Semaj’s life for the better. They have helped with his development by providing the appropriate stimulation and have assisted my family with providing us the resources and programs to further enhance the skills he has learned.

The caring and motivated staff makes him more comfortable in forging new relationships and learning new things. The Center values us as major players in planning his treatment and making decisions that will affect him now and in the future. The family consultants and therapists gave us the tools we needed to help Semaj continue his progress and reinforce what he learned at home. We believe that by attending the Center for Autism, Semaj has been provided with the building blocks necessary for life beyond the Center and prepared him for future success.

—Imani Oliver, Philadelphia, Pa.



Programs and Services

Specialized Autism Services (SAS)

Our Specialized Autism Services (SAS) are intensive, comprehensive treatment programs that are specifically designed to meet the needs of an individual and their family. In addition to providing therapeutic services, we focus on giving families an outlet for support and the resources needed to continue treatment at home and in the community.

The following SAS programs are available:

- Early Intervention (birth to 3 years old): a home-based program for children who exhibit early signs of autism and developmental delays.
*Program Director
Lew Hemmer, MSW, LSW,
ACSW*
- Preschool-aged Children (3 to 5 years old): a daily, intensive treatment program for children diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. This program is held Monday through Friday from 9:00 am-2:00 pm.
*Program Director
Margot Burke, Psy.D.*

- Social Competency (5 years old and up): evening programs designed to facilitate social competency skills in children and adolescents. This program is held Monday through Thursday from 5:00 pm- 7:00 pm.

*Program Director
Douglas Cornman, MA, DTR.*

Evaluation Services

Early evaluation and diagnosis are vital to successful autism treatment. The Center for Autism offers diagnostic evaluations to people of all ages. Through the observation of a person’s behaviors and collection of a developmental, medical and family history, the Center’s team of psychiatrists and specialists are able to determine an individual’s diagnosis and make appropriate recommendations.

Professional Consultation

The Center provides professional consultation services to a variety of people and organizations. Types of consultation include workshops and seminars on assessment and intervention techniques, staff training, behavioral observation, and the development of individualized education, treatment program or life-plan. All consultation services are specialized to meet varying needs.

**For more information on our services,
visit www.thecenterforautism.org/programs.**