

Stepping Stones

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A Newsletter for Milestones – For Kids' Success
Therapist Owned • Child Centered • Family Friendly

Two Great Kids Find Success with the Help of Milestones

At Milestones – For Kids' Success, the best measure of our success can be found on the smiling faces that belong to the children we spend time with every day. Ryan and Maya are two of the children who receive services from Milestones and whose stories share a glimpse of what is possible when families partner with us.

Ryan's Story

Ryan began receiving treatment through Milestones when he was two years old. When he came to Milestones, Ryan did not use more than five words, and he used them very inconsistently. He also had a difficult time sitting and attending, and had very limited communication and poor eye contact.

Ryan was originally diagnosed with pervasive developmental disorder (PDD) with autistic features, but after further testing he was diagnosed with Klinefelter's syndrome. He has been in both speech and occupational therapy at Milestones and has also participated in the groups Come Play with Me, Royal Friends, and Swing and Shout.

Ryan has made steady progress since beginning therapy. The groups particularly benefited Ryan's social skills and gave him an opportunity for peer interaction.

"Ryan has gained a tremendous amount of skills through participation in both occupational and speech therapy" says Ryan's mother, Jeanette.

"His most significant gains occurred between ages 3 and 4 in the areas of speech and those areas impacted by sensory processing. He became more tolerant in all situations, which is something he had difficulty with when he was younger," Jeanette says. Ryan also learned to play with a variety of toys using them in their appropriate functions.

"Ryan made tremendous progress towards his pragmatic skills during the time that I saw him," says Lisa Bartik, MS, CCC/SLP. "He started out unable to greet the therapist and over a period of time, became able to greet peers, other clinicians, and other staff members with very little difficulty."

Ryan is now able to dress himself with minimal assistance, takes turns with peers, writes letters and numbers and has most recently mastered pumping a swing. Ryan's articulation skills have also improved as he's learned to manage his rate and volume, and he is easier to understand when he speaks.

"Ryan developed a positive working relationship with all of the therapists, and I credit these therapists with teaching Ryan not only skills but also manners and social skills above and beyond what I could have done on my own," Jeanette says.

Ryan is five now and will be starting kindergarten this year. He is no longer identified as at risk through the early childhood program.

"As a parent, I am very thankful for all the support from Milestones," says Jeannette. "Without it Ryan would not be the same child that he is today."



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Maya's story

When Maya began occupational therapy at nearly 5 years of age she was unable to copy a cross and square and unable to write her name. Someone at her school suggested she should be given a name stamp because she would never be able to write her own name.

"I couldn't understand how someone could give up on a child so young with so much potential," says Karyn, Maya's mother. "Our speech therapist suggested that I contact Milestones for an occupational therapy evaluation."

Since coming to Milestones, Maya, who has a diagnosis of autism, has worked with different therapists and has made significant gains. At age 7, she continues to gain new skills and currently is working on improving her ability to motor plan through age appropriate activities. This includes developing adequate balance, bilateral coordination, and strength to participate in activities such as hopscotch, jumping jacks, and other activities typical for a 7-year-old girl.

One favorite activity for Maya is walking on "moon shoes" which helps to establish coordination and balance while bouncing as if walking on the moon. "She walks down the hall with such a huge grin on her face that she makes everyone smile and cheer her on," says Francesca Barr, MS, OTR/L. "I have been working with Maya and her family for the past year. She has made some great gains. Her attention span, ability to follow multi-step directions, strength, coordination, and fine-visual motor skills have all significantly improved."

Maya especially enjoys playing on the gym equipment, practicing letter formation and drawing pictures on a vertical wall-mounted mirror in shaving cream. This sensory motor activity gives Maya additional tactile feedback when she works on visual motor activities. The focus of motor planning in Maya's therapy also relates to how she creates a plan for handwriting. In her work with Francesca, Maya will use various strategies such as verbal, visual, and physical cues as well as adaptive writing utensils and paper.

Karyn also works with Maya on handwriting at home with the Handwriting Without Tears® program. Not only can Maya write her name, but she can now write entire sentences and has proper letter spacing.

"She writes, draws, cuts, colors, jumps, plays hopscotch, moon-walks and shows everyday that she has the potential for great things," Karyn says.

"Maya is such a fun-loving spirit," adds Francesca. "She has a contagious laughter which makes working with her so entertaining and rewarding. I truly believe her positive and always cooperative attitude is much of what helps contribute to her success here at Milestones. She is a perfect example of why I enjoy my job so much!"



A Minute with Milestones Staff

Gretchen Manske, Billing Specialist

What she does on the job:

"I started with Milestones in February of 2004 as an administrative assistant and front desk receptionist. As the company grew, I narrowed my focus to my current role as the billing specialist. My current position focuses on accounts receivable for services performed for our families. A majority of my time is spent following-up on denials received from insurance companies, and helping families get the coverage they are entitled to through insurance to help their children develop in healthy ways."

Education and experience:

"I have a Bachelor's degree in Biology. During college, I worked as an administrative assistant with another company. When I

graduated I pursued a position within my degree, first working in a blood testing lab and then assisting researchers as they worked to solve bacterial and mold problems within the paper industry. But I really needed closer ties to helping real people! When I first heard of Milestones, it felt right."

When she isn't working:

With 3 boys ages 9, 4 and 3, Gretchen has very little "free-time." Her oldest is involved in soccer and Tae Kwon Do, and her 4-year old started pre-school this fall. This summer, swimming has been a favorite family activity.

What she likes most about her job:

"I have really enjoyed the years spent at Milestones – For Kids' Success. The staff here is great and I love working with them. I have really enjoyed getting to know the families, watching the kids grow, and being a part of some of their great successes."

A Sensory Approach to Handwriting

Handwriting is a skill many children are naturally interested in, however, not every child can master this task on their own. The therapists at Milestones For Kids' Success are aware of the skills children need to participate and succeed with written communication. Therapists address handwriting difficulties through more than just the pencil and paper. They encourage children to explore, learn, and practice through multi-sensory experiences, and work to tailor treatment styles to the specific needs of each child.

Occupational therapists have the ability to assess and target fine and visual motor skills which are the essential foundation for handwriting. Therapists then assist families in creating strategies to focus on handwriting concerns both in the school and home environments. Common areas of concern addressed in therapy may include letter formation, reversals, sizing, and spacing.


At Milestones we utilize several different approaches to handwriting methods including elements of Handwriting Without Tears®, Getting It Write, Callirobics, and Loops and Other Groups programs. The Handwriting Without Tears® method focuses on a specific teaching order and simple verbal instruction along with strategies for all learning styles. The Getting It Write program provides weekly preparatory and follow-up activities to address underlying components that may be contributing to handwriting difficulties which can range from physical to visual or sensory processing. In the Callirobics technique handwriting sessions are set to music with specific tone, rhythm, and intensity to relate with each exercise. Loops and Other Groups aims at providing systematic steps for motor and memory cues through kinesthetic awareness in learning letter patterns.

Occupational therapists at Milestones combine handwriting programs with other therapeutic interventions in order to identify methods for improving handwriting skills. Therapists provide preparatory activities that will use a variety of activities and exercises. Each child's therapy is individually tailored to meet his/her needs and is adapted to support the child's classroom curriculum. The Milestones therapists take a multi-sensory approach to handwriting that is NOT just about teaching letter formation with paper and pencil. "Different children need different approaches to maximize

learning," says Susan Kattula, MS, OTR/L "We utilize a variety of sensory-motor manipulatives and strategies to give children additional feedback to help improve their writing,"

The multi-sensory experiences created at Milestones may include using a variety of media so that children can gain the feedback to their hands for motor patterns. Therapists may also utilize hand-on letter construction, whole body exercises for kinesthetic and body awareness, etc. When transferring letters or words on to paper, children may use adaptive paper, pencils, and surfaces designed to fit their needs. In addition, therapists use simple yet specific verbal instructions along with modeling to help each child learn letter formation for print and/or cursive.

Many of these multiple strategies were also incorporated into the 10-week handwriting group that was offered this summer at Milestones. This group was run by Laura Harmasch, OTR/L. The group began with preparatory activities that focused on a number of different areas from vestibular to fine motor and visual motor activities. Laura explains that by "having the children start with a movement activity it can help improve their focus in activities that follow." The weekly routine included varied preparatory activities and handwriting exercises.

At the end of each session parents were provided with home program ideas and resources to allow the children opportunities to practice newly acquired skills at home. All in all, it was another great summer for the Milestones handwriting program as every child had the opportunity to work on handwriting goals while having fun with their peers! 



Upcoming Event

Family Outing in Celebration of Milestone's Fifth Anniversary

To celebrate Milestones 5th anniversary, a Family Outing is planned for Saturday, October 13th from 2-5 p.m. at the DuPage Children's Museum. The Dupage Children's Museum is a unique discovery center, designed to stimulate curiosity, creativity, thinking and problem solving among young children through self-directed, interactive exhibits and programs. Come and celebrate our 5th anniversary, enjoy a special treat, and explore the museum's "neighborhoods," which allow children and adults the opportunity to learn and play and to develop skills in the arts, science and math. The museum is located at 301 N. Washington St., Naperville, IL 60540. More information about the Dupage Children's Museum is available at <https://www.dupagechildrensmuseum.org> or by calling 630-637-8000.

For more information about the family outing contact Milestones at 630-792-1800. RSVP's are necessary!



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Summer Session Makes the Days of Summer Anything but Lazy:

Family Support – Parent Presentation

As part of the family support services at Milestones, a program entitled “The Gluten and Dairy Free Diet” was conducted for parents on July 18th. Sueson Vess, author of *Special Eats: Simple, Delicious Solutions for Gluten-Free & Dairy Free Cooking*, offered manageable solutions including cooking tips and recipes. Parents appreciated the practical information and the opportunity to ask specific questions. For more information go to www.specialeats.com.

Summertime at Milestones offered fun and creative activities! We offered programs that were both therapeutic and fun, including:

- **Come Play With Me** – focused on improving social interaction skills in a small group setting.
- **Handwriting Without Tears®** – utilized a multi-sensory approach to reinforce all learning styles including visual, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic.

Watch for the winter issue of Stepping Stones for details about next summer’s programs.

Websites:

www.milestones4kids.com
www.chicagolandbuddywalk.org
www.specialeats.com
www.dupagechildrensmuseum.org

