

Smiles for Miles

As a parent, you look forward to hearing the chatter of your children by the time they reach a certain age. You want to hear them sing their favorite songs, teach them how to say "please" and "thank you" and embrace the sound of the words "I love you, too." For Altamese Baptiste, these joys had to wait. Her son Miles Robinson didn't speak until he was about 4 years old. At that time, Baptiste brought Miles to Marcus Autism Center.

Although he had advanced reading skills, he demonstrated severe language delay and expression, and his speech ability was that of an 18 month old. Doctors diagnosed him with autism, a neurological disorder that affects a child's ability to communicate, understand language, play and relate to others. Because of his autism, Miles' school placed him in special education classes until second grade. But, Altamese knew he needed a more challenging curriculum. His treatment at Marcus helped improve his conversation and socialization skills, and he excelled in math and reading. However, Baptiste struggled with educators to get Miles placed in the right classes.

"I called the folks at Marcus when I had issues with the school system, and they were willing to help me fight for him," Baptiste said. "We knew he deserved an education based on his needs, not his diagnosis."



Miles' treatment at Marcus helped improve his conversation and socialization skills, and he excelled in math and reading.

Thanks to Baptiste's determination, and Marcus staff advocacy, Miles is now thriving in regular education classes. Last year, he had the highest math grade in his fourth grade class and made the honor roll.

It's clear that there is a drive in this little boy to overcome obstacles, and at age 11, Miles is encouraging others to reach for the stars as well. Last spring, he cast aside his once-limited language skills to deliver an articulate and touching commencement speech at his fourth grade graduation.

"When he gave his speech, he was looking out, gesturing and really engaging the audience," said Baptiste. "Everyone, especially me, was a cry baby. We were all clapping and crying, and he even got a standing ovation."

Bonnie Minter, Children's Neurodevelopmental Pediatrics Nurse Practitioner, remembers the quiet child who came in to Marcus in 2004, and can't believe what a well-spoken boy Miles has become. "It's rare to have a kid with autism be able to express himself like this," she said.

The graduation of her son, who had come so far, despite his challenges, was a touching moment for Baptiste. When asked if she thought Marcus staff contributed to Miles' success in any way, she was quick to reply.

"It did not contribute in any one way—it was the way," she said. "Going to Marcus Autism Center was the turning point in Miles' life." ☈

* April is Autism Awareness Month

