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FALL 2020

Special Beginnings...Brighter Futures

# APPLAUSE!

## Grateful Parents.

*"Thank you to everyone at Achievement Academy! We are truly blessed to send James to such a great school."*  
*- Laura, James' Mom*

After experiencing a heartbreaking miscarriage more than five years ago, Laura and her husband, Chris, had a difficult time conceiving. The couple turned to a fertility doctor to help develop a plan to successfully achieve their goal of another pregnancy. During their first meeting, the fertility doctor administered a pregnancy test. To everyone's surprise, the test was positive! Over the course of the next few months, Laura experienced a typical pregnancy. At 33 weeks, however, during an office visit with her obstetrician, Laura's water broke. Laura later described it as one of the most frightening moments of her life! As she rushed to Lakeland Regional Health (LRH), Laura's thoughts turned to her previous miscarriage. The medical staff at LRH immediately responded to Laura's needs and provided medications to strengthen her unborn baby's lungs and to stop the contractions. Three days later, Laura and Chris welcomed their son, "James," who entered the world weighing four pounds.



Baby James spent three and a half weeks in LRH's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) due to several episodes of Bradycardia – a slower-than-normal heart rhythm. Once James was ready for discharge, Laura and Chris brought their new baby James home from the hospital.

At six months old, Laura and Chris noticed that James' head seemed to be tilting to the left side. During a subsequent pediatric appointment, James was diagnosed with torticollis – a condition that causes such "tilting" due to a weakness or other problem with a child's neck muscles. The pediatrician prescribed physical therapy for the condition. After one year of treatment, the family's insurance benefit that covered James' physical therapy ran out. But the Physical Therapist who was working with James urged Laura and Chris to apply for admission to the Achievement Academy, where James could receive physical therapy and early education services at no cost through age 5.

James was successfully enrolled in Achievement Academy's pre-kindergarten Charter School when he was two-and-a-half years old. The Charter School Therapists immediately began working with James on his developmental delays that were due to his premature birth. Since then, James has received individual physical, speech, and occupational therapies each week that are enhanced by personalized educa-

tional instruction in a small classroom setting. When James started school at Achievement Academy, he had difficulty with balance and would frequently fall on level surfaces. Additionally, his core strength was weak, which made sitting on the floor to play with toys a challenge.

Now, James is a happy five-year-old who can run across a mulched playground with his friends and



change directions quickly without falling! He has developed sufficient core strength to easily sit on the floor while putting together a puzzle. The "head tilt" has improved and is now very close to staying centered. James' fine motor skills, such as hand-eye coordination,



have improved by playing catch with a ball, cutting out shapes with scissors and buttoning his own clothes. James now speaks in full sentences and his language is developmentally appropriate.

"We know that without the help of the Achievement Academy, James would not be in the place he is today," Laura explained. "Thank you to everyone at Achievement Acad-



emy! We are truly blessed to send James to such a great school."

Laura and Chris have each worked for Publix Super Markets, Inc. for 20 years. They are grateful for the support provided to the Achievement Academy by the community, Publix Super Markets Charities and the family of Publix founder George Jenkins that continue to help James and his friends at Achievement Academy.

## Giving Hope.

### Jaxon's Story

Just 19 weeks into her pregnancy, Kara found out she had an incompetent cervix. Five weeks later, Kara's cervix began dilating, which propelled her body into labor at just 24 weeks. Her doctor quickly admitted her to the hospital in an attempt to stop the labor. Kara was afraid that her baby would arrive early, an outcome that came true the following week. The baby, who Kara named "Jaxon," was born weighing only 2 pounds, 1

Health Medical Center (LRH) where he would spend the first 96 days of his young life.

The next several months were heartbreaking. The Carol Jenkins Barnett Pavilion for Woman and Children's Level III NICU has private suites for parents to be able to stay with their premature infants. This allowed Kara and Michael to be in the same room as Jaxon, though they were only allowed to hold him every other day for three hours. Each time they held their fragile baby, they watched the clock, trying to slow it down in order to hold Jaxon for another few minutes.

Finally, the day they were waiting to arrive came: Jaxon was released from the hospital. He could finally go home with Kara and Michael.

"When we brought him home from the hospital, it was the most exciting but also the scariest time in our lives," Kara explained. "We had this marvelous tiny little human that had been cared for by a team of doctors and nurses for over three months. Now WE were responsible for him all on our own. As with any parent of a preemie, one of our biggest concerns was making sure Jaxon stayed on track with his developmental milestones. We were already aware

that he was behind. We wanted to do everything we could to help him catch up."



Achievement Academy's Early Interventionist, Laurie Turner, began providing home-based early intervention services when Jaxon was five months old. During the initial developmental assessment, Laurie noted that Jaxon was not holding his head up and that his muscle tone was quite rigid. This is common with many premature babies. Laurie demonstrated ways Kara and Michael

## DID YOU KNOW? FOR EVERY \$1 INVESTED IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS YIELDS MORE THAN \$17 IN RETURN TO SOCIETY.

Due to COVID-19 and the remote-only access to educational instruction and therapies during the final three months of this past school year, children with special needs were at-risk of regressing. With the ongoing threat from the COVID-19 virus looming, in-school learning

could be disrupted again this school year. A child's brain is 90% developed by the age of five, so it is imperative that developmental gains are made – and primary foundations are laid – during this time. By providing small class size instruction and individual physical, speech,

and occupational therapies, we can maximize each child's potential. Will you consider making a thoughtful gift today? Your donations enable us to continue offering the programs and services that have positively impacted the lives of the children we serve.

## Save the Date!

**"Top Chef of Polk County"**  
**6 to 9 p.m. Monday, April 12, 2021**  
**at the RP Funding Center in Lakeland.**

Join us for a night of delicious food and fellowship while raising much-needed funds for children with special needs.

Guests will enjoy a cash bar, silent and live auctions and, of course, a tasting of signature dishes from Polk County's leading chefs. Chefs will create and prepare their signature dish (tapas style) accompanied with a wine or libation that complements the flavors of the dish. All guests will have the opportunity to try all of the chef's signature dishes.

Sponsorships are available. For more information, please visit [www.AchievementAcademy.com](http://www.AchievementAcademy.com) or contact Stacy Williams-Myers, CFRE at 863-683-6504.

### Jaxon's Story (cont'd)

could hold, carry and position Jaxon to encourage greater flexibility.

Laurie also discussed the importance of "tummy time" to help Jaxon build neck and core strength. This would prepare Jaxon for rolling, crawling, sitting and eventually, walking. Laurie also gave the couple a black, white and red developmental toy to help stimulate Jaxon's vision. The contrasting colors help hold Jaxon's attention for a longer period of time. When a baby is able to focus and become visually stimulated, physical activity follows closely behind.

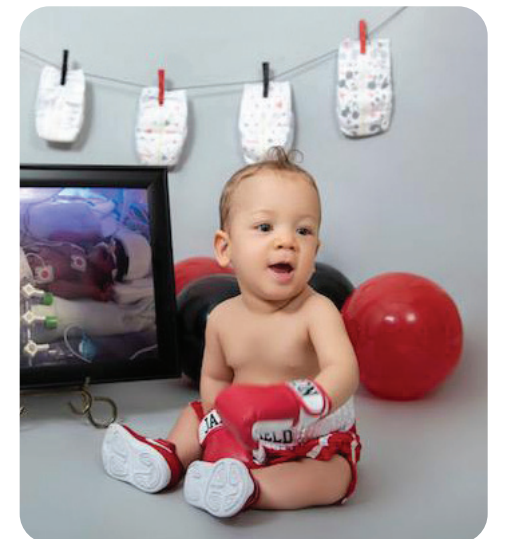
In March, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the way Laurie provided early intervention services changed to reflect the reality of the pandemic. Instead of home visits, Laurie communicated with Kara regularly, answered Kara's questions and provided developmental activities

specifically designed to continue Jaxon's progress at home with his parents in a safe environment.

This past month, Laurie was again able to provide a home-based early intervention session. Precautions are being taken to enhance the safety and wellness of staff, children and families at all times during these visits.

Jaxon is now 18 months old and has progressed in all areas of his development. He is taking rings off a "stacker" during cognitive and fine motor play, crawling on his hands and knees, as well as "cruising" along furniture. Jaxon can even say "mama" and "dada!"

"From the first time Laurie came to our home, she has helped us ensure Jaxon is reaching his milestones," Kara concluded. "We are eternally grateful for all that Laurie and Achievement Academy's Birth to Three Program



have done for Jaxon and for us."

Achievement Academy's Birth to Three Program offers free early intervention services to children from birth to three years old. The program is free and open to any parent having a concern about their infant or toddler's development.



ounce. The tiny newborn immediately began to fight to survive. Jaxon's lungs were not fully developed - he was not able to breathe on his own. He was rushed to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Lakeland Regional