

CELEBRATING

Mississippians with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

'Typical teen' enjoys life at home after stay at Mississippi Adolescent Center



It's a school night and Patrick, 13, is behaving like any normal teenager. He eats heartily when a plate of teriyaki chicken and vegetables is set down before him at the dinner table. However, a glass of iced tea is brushed aside in favor of a soft drink. When dinner is over, he picks up his dad's cell phone and retreats to the living room couch to bury himself in the latest app.

To an outside observer, Patrick is like any other 13-year-old boy. But, his dad soon reveals to visitors to the modern home in a quiet subdivision in Petal that Patrick is autistic. He can't speak and must attend a special self-contained class at Petal High for others with intellectual and development disabilities. Allen Blackledge says his son is enjoying school and life at the family's spacious home. However, life wasn't always so tranquil for Patrick. That's when Mississippi Adolescent Center in Brookhaven stepped in.

"Patrick had gotten older and it was no longer acceptable for him to eat with his fingers and exhibit other behaviors that hindered his time at school and from participating in leisure activities," said Blackledge. "He often communicated his feelings in ways that left both of us frustrated. After learning of the MAC's programs, as hard as it was for me to be away from him, I knew it was time for him to receive specialized treatment."

Blackledge says the first time he went to pick up Patrick for a weekend visit and observed him eating in the MAC cafeteria with his new friends, he knew he'd made the right decision.

"The staff at MAC was absolutely wonderful to Patrick," he said. "The teachers worked one-on-one with him and were so loving and kind. They taught him valuable socialization skills, like table manners and how to work and get along well with others. I can't say enough about the tremendous impact they had in a short period of time on Patrick's life and as a result, on mine."

As he glances at his young son happily engrossed in a cell phone, Blackledge's eyes fill with tears. He struggles with the emotions that come to the surface when he discusses Patrick's progress as a result of the services he received at MAC.

"I can't imagine my life without Patrick," said Blackledge. "To watch him enjoy life... catching the bus in the morning to go to school, which he loves...going to the beach...riding together in my truck...it means more than I can express. I will never forget the role MAC played in helping Patrick become the boy he is today," said Blackledge.

"Patrick is my life...my heart."



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