

InTouch

Fall 2017

A publication for the many friends and supporters of ChildServe

Journey to a *Great* Life

Aim's Story

Our attitude is the one thing in life we can always control, but it's easier said than done. Despite being young and living through some tough situations, 19-year-old Aim has already mastered the skill of facing life with a smile.

Aim moved to Des Moines with his sister Ann several years ago after living in a refugee camp in Thailand. The camp's tight living quarters and limited food supply were not a healthy place for anyone, much less for Aim, who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair. Though he didn't speak any English at the time, Aim came to Iowa to work toward a better future.

After regaining weight and flexibility through intensive rehabilitation at ChildServe's pediatric rehabilitation unit, Aim was ready to focus on building his independence and communication skills. He moved into a ChildServe group home at age 17.

Stephanie Shimp, the house supervisor, watched the progress he's made since he moved in two years ago.

"Aim has an amazing personality," she says. "We knew he would be a great fit with the other teenage boys in the house. Our biggest challenge in the beginning was communication. It was hard to understand exactly what he needed, since English isn't his first language."

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Aim spoke no English when he came to Des Moines from Thailand, but he has grown remarkably through intensive therapy at ChildServe. 



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Discover how Aim overcame obstacles and is making great strides.



Coming Into His Own

Day Habilitation gives young adults like Lucas a chance to build important skills for life.



Family Advisory Committee

Members of ChildServe's Family Advisory Committee are a critical bridge between families and the services we provide.



Autism Day Health Builds Confidence for the Future

Our innovative Autism Day Health is helping children like Norah succeed and will soon expand to Ames.



Making an Impact

Brian Laurenzo's leadership as chair of the Board of Trustees has been instrumental in advancing our mission.

Board of Directors and Trustees



In May, ChildServe celebrated the one-year anniversary of our locations in Iowa City and North

Liberty! We've enjoyed the opportunity to form new partnerships in the community and look forward to continuing to serve children and families in eastern Iowa.

Journey to a

Continued from Page 1

English wasn't even Aim's second or third language—it was his fifth. Learning yet another language was made possible through support programs at ChildServe and school.

"Aim's English has exploded thanks to receiving speech therapy through ChildServe and support for ESL [English as a Second Language] at school," Stephanie says. "In the past two years, he has developed so much—we have no trouble communicating with each other now."

Today, Aim can often be found flashing a smile at everyone who comes into the home. He enjoys talking about the day over supper with his five housemates before doing chores like clearing the table and cleaning his

room. He then likes to watch movies or visit with family members.

"My favorite things to do at school are read, use the computer and talk with my friends," Aim says. "After school, I like to relax and play games on my iPad."

Even though his life has changed drastically due to his improvements in health, communication and independence, part of Aim will always remember a time when life was hard, food was scarce and he wasn't able to live up to his potential.

When asked about the differences between life in Thailand and his life in Iowa, Aim smiles and says simply, "It's good here."



Aim plays cards with Stephanie Shimp, house supervisor.

Great Life

Inside ChildServe's New Group Home

For Aim, and many other children and young adults, ChildServe's group homes provide a place to overcome obstacles and improve social and daily living skills. This spring, ChildServe completed a new custom-built duplex group home in Johnston.

Donations to ChildServe's Foundation helped raise more than 50 percent of the cost to build the new duplex, which can provide care for a total of 12 children. The home officially opened in June, and despite the humid weather outside on moving day, it felt like Christmas morning inside. The sounds of children eagerly exploring their new home bounced down the hall as boxes were unpacked and the children and staff got settled.

Anna Sindt is ChildServe's house supervisor over the two group homes that transitioned into the new house. Before making the move, Anna and the direct care staff talked to the children about what the new house would be like.

"The children were all so excited when the day finally came," Anna says. "We had a dance and pizza party to celebrate. We spent the afternoon getting their rooms set up how they wanted and finished the night with a movie. It was a really fun day for everyone!"

The home was specially designed for ChildServe. Everything from the kitchen and living spaces, to the bathroom designs and overall layout of the home and yard is accessible, adaptable and will safely provide for the needs of kids with special healthcare concerns.

"I love that in our group homes, all the children are able to do as much as they possibly can," Anna says. "The new home makes it much easier to practice important tasks like laundry, cooking and having social interactions. We help them build skills they can use throughout their lives."

ChildServe's new duplex group home in Johnston opened in June and can serve up to 12 children.





Coming Into His Own

Lucas' Story

As the date for Lucas' high school graduation crept closer, this life milestone brought more questions than answers for his mother Sheree and their family. Due to Lucas' intellectual disability, Sheree worried about how to fill his days with meaningful activities once the routine of going to school was over.

"He loved school and the new things he'd learn so much," Sheree says. "We were afraid he'd just be sitting at home every day with no motivation."

Lucas is now a high school graduate and wakes up thrilled about what the day holds. His excitement begins the night before, when he lays out his clothes and packs his backpack for the next day. The source of his happiness? Lucas attends Day Habilitation five days a week at ChildServe in Johnston.

“Day Habilitation is one of the best things you can do for your child.”

—Sheree, Lucas' mother

Day Habilitation helps young adults with intellectual disabilities transition to adulthood. Lucas spends his days working on skill-building, communication, listening and safety.

Sheree has seen Lucas' independence and confidence grow by leaps and bounds. He loves seeing his friends and completing fun activities that also help build important skills for life.

"He zips into ChildServe, hangs up his bag and socializes with friends. Some days he'll start on a daily chore like folding laundry right away," she says. "At home, we can see his

independence growing when he cleans up the kitchen, plans his outfit for the next day and puts dirty clothes in the hamper."

The program also helps Lucas interact outside of his home.

"Day Habilitation is one of the best things you can do for your child," Sheree says. "The program helps young adults create a routine, continue learning, build friendships, be visible and participate in the community. Our children need to feel included. At Day Habilitation, kids enjoy this group of peers and caregivers who become like family."

Part of the Community

Aleigh Glazier, Day Habilitation team lead, is passionate about helping people with intellectual disabilities.

"I have always thought, with much disappointment, that people with special needs are an invisible branch of our population," she says. "Many of the individuals we serve are not able to advocate for themselves, so we need to do everything in our power to advocate on their behalf. Day Habilitation increases not only their own understanding of society and the world around them, but also increases their visibility to the rest of the community."



Lucas has become more confident and independent through ChildServe's Day Habilitation program. 

Partners for Success

Family Advisory Committee Provides Perspective



When Christina De Shaw brought her daughter Ava (pictured at left) home from Mayo Clinic after two open heart surgeries and almost six months in the hospital, she wasn't sure how her family was going to manage.

“We were referred to ChildServe,

and they have been by our side ever since,

providing the wide range of services our family has needed on this journey,” she says. “It wasn't enough for my daughter to survive her heart surgeries. I wanted her to thrive and live a great life. Thanks to ChildServe she is doing just that.”

No one knows what families need better than the families themselves. As chair of ChildServe's Family Advisory Committee, Christina shares advice and wisdom that can only be gained through firsthand experience.

“The journey that we are on with our amazing kids is unique and very different than what most parents experience,” Christina says. “The Family Advisory Committee is an outstanding opportunity to bring everyone together for honest discussions about what is working or what can be improved upon, and to brainstorm and discuss new and improved ways to help children live a great life.”

Barb Williams, Respite/Supported Community Living service manager at ChildServe, has helped facilitate the committee since it formed in 2012. The committee improves the connection between the families served and the staff members, management and boards who provide care, design programs and lead ChildServe. With its unique position

between the groups, the Family Advisory Committee acts as a gateway to keep the path of communication open.

“Every time I leave a meeting with the Family Advisory Committee, I feel inspired by their enthusiasm and energy,” Barb says. “Their work to improve services and support what's going on all across ChildServe helps our organization stay motivated to make our mission a reality.”

In June, members of the advisory committee participated in the annual Run, Walk & FUN 4 the Kids. Kathy Sheng, vice chair of the committee, helped design an activity booth at the event's Finish Line Festival.

“The Family Advisory Committee can play a special support role in fundraising events, as we share enthusiasm for the difference that ChildServe can make in the lives of families it serves,” she says.

While ChildServe benefits from the support and input from the committee, it's hard to tell which group is more grateful. It's clear that each group inspires the other.

 Kathy Sheng, a member of the Family Advisory Committee, and friends enjoyed the Finish Line Festival at the Run, Walk & FUN 4 the Kids.



Autism Day Health Builds Confidence for the Future

Norah's Story

Norah lets her imagination run wild each day at Autism Day Health. She can use her creativity to turn the classroom into anything she wants.

"She'll have everyone play "Wheels on the Bus" and line the chairs up next to each other," says Masyn Sayre, Day Health lead, who's worked with Norah since she first began in the program. "Or, she'll make porridge for the *Three Little Bears* and know one is too hot and the other too cold."

ChildServe's Autism Day Health program offers specialized care for children ages 2 to 5 with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Children receive positive behavioral support from staff along with occupational, speech and physical therapy on-site.

Norah's parents, Megan and Tyler, learned she was on the autism spectrum right before her third birthday. After some careful research, the family gave ChildServe's Autism Day Health a try.

Megan and Tyler appreciate having all of Norah's services integrated into the program.

"At the end of the day, she's getting specialized services catered to exactly what she needs in what already feels like a school setting for her," Tyler says.

Children receive individual speech and occupational therapy. In the classroom, they work on their goals in a more generalized form.

"Autism Day Health is unique because it gives children the social aspect that they don't get if they are only in therapy," Masyn says. "They get the schedule aspect for when they do start going to preschool or kindergarten."



 Norah and Masyn work together to achieve Norah's goals in Autism Day Health.

Making Daily Progress

Norah herself has enjoyed Autism Day Health and has become more social. She loves her friends and teachers. Since coming to ChildServe, she's adapted to schedule changes throughout the day more easily than she did before. Her therapists and other staff members who work with her no longer need to prompt her before she goes to therapy. Now 6, Norah begins kindergarten this fall.

"Having the opportunity for Norah to receive specialized services through Day Health enables us to see the great progress that she's made," Megan says.

Adds Tyler: "It provides us with a great sense of confidence for her future."

Even more children like Norah will have the opportunity to benefit from Autism Day Health when the service expands to ChildServe in Ames this fall. The program will be the first of its kind in the Ames community and will fulfill a unique need for children on the autism spectrum and their families.

 Since beginning Autism Day Health, Norah has made progress on a daily basis.

Making an Impact

Brian Lorenzo, Outgoing Chair of the Board of Trustees



“Before I understood what ChildServe was, I expected to walk into a very sad place. However, like everyone who visits ChildServe, I quickly realized how much the people who work here love coming in every day. I realized that every child who receives services here has a better quality of life than they would have otherwise.”

The days when Brian Lorenzo knew little about ChildServe are long gone. As outgoing chair of the Board of Trustees, Brian spent the past four years carefully setting specific goals for growth and working hard to increase ChildServe’s ability to care for more children every year.

“I fell in love with ChildServe and its mission to help children with special healthcare needs live a *great* life,” Brian says. “ChildServe is one of a kind. As chair, I wanted to increase the number of kids we serve, our ability to share our mission with the community and make sure it’s clear to everyone how unique our services are. To help us reach these goals, we have added amazing individuals who can take the Board of Trustees to the next level by expanding our ability to fundraise and engage with our community.”

One way Brian met these goals is through the expansion of ChildServe’s signature fundraising gala, Bubble Ball. Cheri Burns, director of development and community relations at ChildServe, saw the steps Brian took which enabled Bubble Ball to dramatically increase its contribution to the ChildServe Foundation.

“Brian analyzed the sponsorships for Bubble Ball and realized there was an opportunity to involve more local businesses,” Cheri says. “He helped identify goals that would stretch us and was tenacious about meeting them. Thanks to his leadership, Bubble Ball has raised over \$1 million since its inception in 2011.”

Along with Brian’s fundraising expertise, he also brought an emphasis on teamwork to his role as chair.

“Brian is a collaborative leader,” adds Lloyd VanderKwaak, President/CEO of ChildServe. “He forged great working relationships with the chair of the Board of Directors, ensuring that the strategic goals of the Board of Trustees and the Board of Directors were aligned and moving in the same direction—to advance the mission of ChildServe.”

While he’s transitioning from board chair back to board member, Brian looks forward to supporting the work of future leaders.

“This board, both current and incoming, is a true game-changer for ChildServe and the kids who benefit—I’m so proud to be included in what comes next.”

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ChildServe

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OUR MISSION:

We partner with families to help children with special healthcare needs live a *great* life.

If you have an update to your contact information or would like to be added or removed from our mailing list, please contact Roxanne Wicks at 515-727-1480 or roxannw@childserve.org.

get social      



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SPONSORED BY GABUS AUTOMOTIVE GROUP

SAVE THE DATE!

September 7, 2017

The Legacy Golf Club

Norwalk, Iowa



Your future gift to ChildServe helps us expand our services so that children like Aim, pictured at right, can achieve their goals. Complete the information inside to create your legacy and benefit our children and families.

Strengthen Your Connection



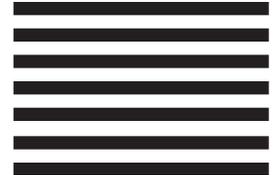
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