

Jayden Carr

BY MICHELLE SOLOMON

“MSI gave us our child back.”

When Jayden Carr turned six on February 27, he had chalked up multiple hospital stays, hundreds of hours of rehabilitation and physical therapy, and countless days working with speech and behavioral therapists. Yet, anyone who comes in contact with him says just about the same thing: Jayden Carr has the determination of an Olympic athlete.



It was a little more than three years ago when the then-two-year-old from Hollywood, Florida, was in a car being driven by his grandmother, Pamela Carr. It was a sunny afternoon on September 12, 2006. A woman with a history of drunken driving on her police record sped through a four-way stop, smashing into the back seat door where Jayden was sitting.

Call it mother's intuition, but Amy Bobotis-Carr had a hunch something was wrong. She vividly remembers the day that her life and that of her family's was forever changed.

“I knew that day when I kissed him goodbye that it could be the last goodbye,” Bobotis-Carr recalled. “At the exact time of the accident, around

3:15 p.m., I started to get nervous. I was pacing.”

Jayden and his grandmother usually arrived home between 3:15 and 3:30, so there was no tardiness, just a mother's gut feeling about her child.

“‘Something is not right,’ I said to myself, so I went looking,” she said. Not far from the family home, she saw her mother-in-law's car, smashed and pushed onto the lawn of a home. “Police told me they had never seen anything like it. You don't expect to see seasoned policemen with tears in their eyes.”

“A painful nightmare”

The following weeks were a “painful nightmare,” said Bobotis-Carr, as she and her husband, Randy, knew they had to accept what had happened. Jayden had suffered severe traumatic brain injury. They had to move on and do the best for their child.

Jayden needed more specialized help. He now had attention deficits and behavioral issues as a result of his injuries. “His brain was so scrambled,” recalled his mother.

“Jayden's brain injury was very significant and impacted the way he processed information, as well as his physical development,” said Roni Leiderman, Ph.D., dean of the Mailman Segal Institute for Early Childhood

Studies at Nova Southeastern University.

“I remember the call that I got from Amy. She asked what I thought about her son coming to the Mailman Segal Institute for preschool.”

After evaluating Jayden, Leiderman and the Carrs agreed that it would be beneficial for him to participate in MSI's Family Center Preschool. The Family Center Preschool and Infant and Toddler Programs utilize both traditional and innovative teaching methods, honoring child-centered educational paradigms, using its 5-C curriculum framework developed by the professional staff members at MSI. (The 5-C curriculum is communication, critical thinking, concept development, creativity, and cooperation.)



Roni Leiderman, left, with Amy Bobotis-Carr and Jayden.

“Jayden was mainstreamed into our program with the understanding that he needed additional therapeutic support and intervention,” says Leiderman.

“There would not have been a better, safer environment for him to be in,” said Bobotis-Carr. “MSI was his foundation to starting over again.”

Before MSI, the family had already enlisted a number of specialists. “I had visited their home, observed Jayden receiving therapy, and discussed the intensive scheduling of therapeutic support for him. We worked closely with their therapists and layered it with our support in our program,” said Leiderman.

Jayden’s teachers at the Family Center Preschool, Nancy Meyers and Kim Boggs, were the “frontline people,” Leiderman explained, “and made a critical difference in the positive outcomes for Jayden. There was always an open dialogue with the family, and we were responsive to their needs, suggestions, and feedback.”

By the time Jayden came to prekindergarten, he had already benefited from his home care and the year he had spent in the three-year-old program at MSI. There were still hurdles, and he would get frustrated by his limitations, Meyers remembered. Through his experiences in the Family Center Preschool, he made significant and ongoing progress. Those working with him saw him becoming more social and his self-esteem soared. His motor developments improved greatly; he made friends, learned to read, and excelled in many areas.

Making leaps and bounds

Jayden’s doctors, teachers, therapists, and parents believe that his willingness to overcome his challenges also made the difference. “He was never discouraged in any way, and he made leaps and bounds in the year I had him in my classroom,” said Boggs. “From the first day I met him, I could see his determination.”

While Jayden learned, a reciprocal education was taking place for faculty members and students.

At MSI’s core is the opportunity to present hands-on learning experiences to NSU students studying early childhood, speech/language therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and applied behavior analysis. NSU graduate students from various fields also participate in, and learn from, the unique professional setting.

“We take our job very seriously, and we always acknowledge that, for every parent, the most important thing in the world is their child. We got to be part of Jayden’s journey and that was quite amazing,” said Leiderman.

Jayden, now in prekindergarten at NSU’s University School, was selected to receive a Distinguished Alumni Award during NSU’s 2009 Celebration of Excellence. In the past, MSI has honored teachers, community partners, and alumni, but never such a recent graduate.

While Jayden still has a long road ahead of him, Bobotis-Carr continues to celebrate her “second family,” the support team of faculty and staff members at MSI during Jayden’s two years there. She said that was the most invaluable gift anyone could give to the Carr family, which also includes brother, J.C., who is 7. “Everyone at MSI gave us their expertise, their guidance, and their hearts to help Jayden. We are truly grateful to MSI for giving us our child back.” ■

About MSI

The Mailman Segal Institute for Early Childhood Studies (MSI) is located in the Jim & Jan Moran Family Center Village at Nova Southeastern University.

MSI’s renowned and accredited Parenting Place, Baudhuin Preschool, and Family Center Preschool and Infant and Toddler Programs are available for children ages six weeks to five years of age and their families.

The institute’s teachers and multidisciplinary child study teams—including occupational, speech, family, and behavior therapists; psychologists; and educators—identify and support for all children, including those who have special needs or learning or behavior challenges.

For more information, visit www.nova.edu/msi/index.html.