70 YEARS

Meyer Center
for Special Children

The Meyer Center has been foremost leader in serving children with disabilities for nearly seven decades. It began with the vision of educating children with cerebral palsy and has grown into what we know today.

Today, the Meyer Center serves children with disabilities through a unique model that combines early-childhood education, school-based therapies, and nursing services all under one roof. These intensive services, provided at such an early age, change the trajectory of a child's life.

The future for children with disabilities is brighter than ever before as they experience more and more opportunities to be included in the community, secure gainful employment and enjoy long-term independence.

1954: The Birth of a Vision

Twenty years before children with disabilities even had access to a public education, Dr. Leslie Meyer recognized that in the right environment, every child could learn and fulfill their potential regardless of circumstances or disabilities.

1975: Education for All Handicapped Children

For the first time in history, "students with exceptionalities" were no longer separated from their peers and were awarded the right to receive a quality education in "the least restrictive environment" possible.

1986: Funding for Preschool Interventions

Families no longer had to wait until their child was school-aged to be screened and/or begin receiving services. Early intervention services were funded to facilitate school readiness and success.

1990s: All Handicapped Children Act was reauthorized as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (or IDEA)

Progress continues with further emphasis being placed on entire-life outcomes, not simply birth to eighteen. Additional amendments were established to ensure students with disabilities were academically challenged, experienced greater inclusion into mainstream school as well as instituting more support for students transitioning from high school to their futures.

The Assistive Technology Act was also passed to ensure students with disabilities were given the opportunity to utilize necessary technology (from braille to electronic tablets) to help them succeed. With these tools, teachers could better challenge and verify the comprehension of non-verbal students. No more guessing games, just pure communication.

2000s:

The focus continues to be dismantling the assumption that students with disabilities are not capable of learning or adding value to society by shifting focus to what children with disabilities can achieve when provided inclusionary opportunities in their education and pursuit of employment/job training opportunities.

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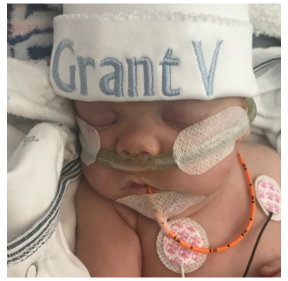
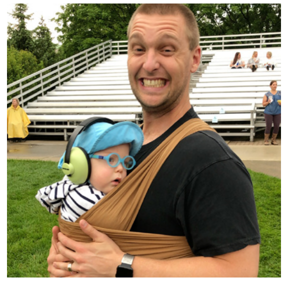
THE EARLY DAYS





As an engineer and physician, we like numbers. We like facts. We like "fixing". It is difficult to describe how our lives changed when our son Grant was born at 26 weeks gestation (to the day). During the 135 days we spent in the NICU, doctors and specialists shared frightening stats about Grant's future. With so many unknowns, we began to face the fact that our vision for our family had changed dramatically.

Our NICU stay was a rollercoaster. Grant challenged our comfort zones daily. We had so much to learn in those early days. Dad jumped right in reading to Grant from engineering magazines while he rested in his isolette. Mom sang the same songs daily to connect with a baby she was learning to nurse. Every day Physical Therapists and Occupational Therapists showed us how to touch our child meaningfully; how to feed our child with wires and tubes everywhere; and how to be first time parents in a nursery outside of our home. We were new parents who felt vulnerable and helpless; totally dependent on a team to show us how to take care of our child.

THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

At the time of Grant's birth, we were living in Georgia while Samantha finished her medical residency. We knew our plan was to move back to the Upstate of SC, specifically Samantha's hometown of Easley. We started hearing about the Meyer Center from friends and decided to visit the Meyer Center while we were in town over a long weekend.

We were immediately overwhelmed by the hope and possibilities the school provided. We applied as soon as we could and even entertained the idea of moving him to SC without mom to ensure he would get a spot. Ultimately, we decided to stay together as a family in Georgia but were oh so fortunate to be offered a spot the next full school year. We were thrilled at this opportunity for Grant.

Our vision for Grant is the same as every parent. We want him to feel safe, loved and most of all accepted. Like all first-time parents, we were extremely nervous for his first day of school. Will they love him enough? Will they know how to soothe his cries? Will they be able to feed him? How will they teach him? Two weeks in, he quit crying and holding his breath at drop off. It was obvious our son loved school!

All our fears dissolved, and we felt such an intense relief as the Meyer Center staff fully embraced Grant – seeing all his potential. They love harder than any people you could meet, but the question still loomed in our minds; will he make friends?!? We can't walk into the school without EVERYONE saying, "Hey Grant!" From his first day, we started getting notes from his teachers about his budding friendships. Today, Grant has lots of friends, and his friends playfully call him "Grant Man" to which Grant returns the greeting with his biggest smile.

"EYE" CAN TALK

Grant started at the Meyer Center when he was only 2 years old. In the beginning, he was cautious and somewhat fearful of his surroundings, but his team of teachers and therapists quickly sensed that he was a very smart little boy who was trapped in a body that made it hard for him to show the world what he knew. His team of teachers and therapists began collaborating to develop strategies that would give him the best chance of success in accessing and communicating with the world around him.

The biggest skill Grant has learned is how to access his voice using his eyes.

Through Occupational and Physical therapy, he has learned tactics to help calm his body when his movements interfere with what he wants to accomplish, and he has gained a great deal of strength and coordination. The biggest skill Grant has learned is how to access his voice using his eyes.

You see, Grant is non-verbal, as are about 50% of his peers at the Meyer Center. We often get asked out in public "how do you understand his needs?" but after the stranger spends a couple of minutes with Grant, they quickly see that he communicates everything and never uses a single word. But that doesn't mean finding a way for him to communicate with the world isn't a priority for us and his team at the Meyer Center.

Very early on, his Speech therapist began trying various eye gaze communication devices with him, knowing that eye gaze technology would give him the best chance of successfully communicating with the world around him. She worked closely with his Occupational and Physical therapists to best position him with the adaptive equipment (activity chair, wheelchair, stander) he needed to access his speech device, socialize with peers, and get out into the community safely.

Although he still has a long road ahead of him, Grant absolutely loves his device. He is now able to use his device to participate in classroom circle time and in a language group with other device users. Just the other day during language group, he was able to use his device to ask another child his name, age, where he lives and what he likes to do. He was also able to tell that friend those things about himself. Grant loves to joke - a lot!

Scan to see a video of Grant's voice.

Being at the Meyer Center has opened a world of possibilities for Grant. The intensive therapies and highly collaborative model between therapy and education has provided him with a strong foundation for continued success. We continue to celebrate that Grant has found his voice.

GRANT'S FUTURE

Since his birth, Grant has shown us that he was going to be the best teacher any of us had ever had. He taught the NICU team to never assume anything. He taught his mom and dad that they are not in control. He taught his first nanny, an older seasoned caregiver, how to incorporate play and therapy. He has taught his cousins about differences and sameness. He has taught us about ways to approach and discuss with others in the disability community- the clearest and friendliest inquiry we have received has been "What's his story?" He has also taught friends in the community how easily you can modify an activity to be more inclusive.

The staff at the Meyer Center have given us the confidence to know that we can, and we must, fight for Grant's opportunity to continue his education alongside his typically developing peers. We know that he has the potential to thrive, contribute, and teach others because he works hard, loves learning, and can't help but make people love him. We often half-joke that he will follow in his dad's footsteps and become an engineer once he masters utilizing his eye gaze device. **When he becomes an adult, we know he will be able to thrive in an office environment, utilize his fun and inquisitive mind, and be a great part of a team – what else could we wish for as parents?**

Seventy years ago, the majority of students with disabilities were excluded from public education and the popular assumption was that they were not capable of learning. Today the opportunities for children like Grant to develop their talents, share their gifts and contribute to the greater community have even more potential.

You have the potential to help our students reach theirs. Your generous contribution will provide every child with a disability with the opportunity to receive a quality education and lifechanging therapies they need. The Meyer Center cannot do this important work without you.

Please make a tax-deductible donation using the enclosed envelope or donate online at *meyercenter.org*