

KENDALL GAZETTE

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Carrie Brazer Center for Autism helps children make progress

BY MARTINA BALDWIN

National Autism Awareness Month was in April, but Autism Awareness is a part of daily life at the Carrie Brazer Center for Autism.

Ribhi Abadeldayem, 6, on the autism spectrum, is a student who is enrolled in the Carrie Brazer Center for Autism day school, after school, Saturday and summer camp programs. When Ribhi first came to the center in the summer of 2010, he was unable to respond to his name or follow a one step instruction. He was reluctant to participate in group activities and was uncomfortable in any new environment.

These characteristics are common among children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs). According to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), ASDs begin before the age of 3 and last throughout a person's life, although symptoms may improve over time.

Some children with an ASD show hints of future problems within the first few months of life. In others, symptoms might not show up until 24 months or later. Some children with an ASD seem to develop normally until around 18 to 24 months of age and then they stop gaining new skills, or they lose the skills they once had.

A person with an ASD might:

- Not respond to their name by 12 months;
- Not point at objects to show interest (point at an airplane flying over) by 14 months;
- Not play "pretend" games (pretend to "feed" a doll) by 18 months;
- Avoid eye contact and want to be alone;
- Have trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about their own feelings;
- Have delayed speech and language skills;
- Repeat words or phrases over and over (echolalia);
- Give unrelated answers to questions;
- Get upset by minor changes;
- Have obsessive interests;
- Flap their hands, rock their body, or spin in circles, and
- Have unusual reactions to the way things sound, smell, taste, look, or feel.

One out of every 110 children is affected with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). ASDs are among the most common develop-



Ribhi Abadeldayem, 6, participates in the Carrie Brazer Center for Autism horseback riding physical education/hippotherapy program.

mental disabilities in the world.

The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities at the University of Miami and Nova Southeastern University states: Autism Spectrum Disorders cross barriers of race, ethnicity and social class. Although the specific causes of Autism Spectrum Disorders are still unknown, research suggests that ASD is a biological condition that affects the way the brain develops and functions.

With the help of intervention and support services, individuals with ASD can make progress and achieve a higher quality of life.

Ribhi still has an autism spectrum disorder and still has difficulties relating to people and his environment, but his parents and the staff at the Carrie Brazer Center for Autism report a notable change in his ability to cooperate and remain involved in group activities like basketball, music and yoga classes. Also, Ribhi is learning to transition from one activity to the next while holding hands and carrying his daily schedule.

Recently, he has started to use the classroom iPad to practice his academic and communication goals. The interactive and hands on quality of each iPad educational application has helped him master colors, letters, functions and numbers. Also, he is more

social with his classmates since he loves to watch them work and help with their activities. Ribhi also can be seen interacting during reading by mimicking teacher movements during story and circle time.

For the past 11 years, the Carrie Brazer Center for Autism has been serving children with similar disabilities who are on the autism spectrum. The center has two locations in Miami Dade County. Their Elementary School is located at 8790 SW 94 St. The Middle School, High School, and Adult Vocational School, located at 7425 SW 42 St., provides the students with necessary life skills and vocational skills to enhance their ability to live and work more independently, in addition to the traditional educational courses. Florida McKay Scholarships for Children with Disabilities are accepted at both locations.

Research is ongoing to find a cure for autism spectrum disorders and hopefully Ribhi and his schoolmates will be the beneficiaries of the research. In the meantime, schools like the Carrie Brazer Center for Autism will continue to make autism awareness a part of each day.

For more information about the Carrie Brazer Center for Autism, visit the website at <www.cbc4autism.org> or call 305-271-8790.