

## OUR SUCCESS STORY

For all of you:

Words will never begin to describe the gratitude my family will forever hold for Dr. Joan, Miss Stephanie and Miss Rebecca.

As I debate how to begin our success story, one I've tried to write a million times since learning that Braden's graduation was near, I am stunned that I can't find the words. The staff at Vision Development Center would tell you that words are not scarce when Braden and I are around. And yet, here I am, struggling to put into words the monumental blessings these ladies have brought into my family's life. I have just come from Vision Therapy with my son, Braden, and to say the day was stressful would definitely be putting it mildly. A 'hot mess' is what Braden would call it. I told myself that Braden and I could pull it together for one more hour, then we would be home free. But it was to be one of those days in which the dam was going to break whether I wanted it to or not. And sure enough as I walked through the door, inhaling deeply the scent that is uniquely that of the Vision Development Center, I am enveloped in a warm hug, comforted, healing and with the deepest of sighs, I relax into one of the many comfy chairs in the family room.

That was all it took. The dam didn't just break, it exploded, and as I wept tears of frustration, fear, stress, sadness and happiness, the ladies of this most wonderful establishment, with tissues in hand continued on.

I knew it was coming. I had managed to break down only three times during our family's one year long adventure with Dr. Joan and her staff -- once, in the beginning, once close to the middle, and then as to be expected right up to the end. Believe me when I say ONLY THREE times, a feat within itself given our roller coaster ride of an emotional journey. It should be part of the fine print when you sign up....'Meltdowns possible: Bring tissues, bring your big girl pants, and bring chocolate for those days when you leave the big girl pants at home and you just can't keep it together'.

But our story begins before that....

Braden was four when he began to complain about his headaches. Who knows how long he was experiencing them prior to being able to express them verbally, but four years old and starting preschool is my earliest recollection. A month could go by and he would be fine, but then the onslaught of headaches would begin. Once a week for roughly twenty minutes, Braden would complain of a headache, vomit, then act like nothing happened. We sought out a medical doctor to rule out any worst case scenarios and possibly bring us some peace of mind or give us some information as to why he had the headaches or what was causing them. We received a prescription....no tests, no scans....a prescription and a word of caution in regards to natural remedies. The doctor stated that my son was a good candidate for migraines and prescribed him a medication to be taken three times a day for as long as it took for the migraines to go

away. Now, I'm not about to grow a bunch of random herbs in my backyard and start feeding them to my son, but I'm not too quick to put my child on a prescription medicine for an extended period of time without trying other options either. My husband and I didn't have migraines, so why would Braden? A headache is typically a symptom of some other underlying issue, right? And so began the tedious micromanaging my son's life for the next several years.

We logged what he ate, how long he slept, his fluid intake, amount of physical activity, time spent in front of the television, or reading books/homework. We had him into the chiropractor on a routine basis. He missed school, playdates, family get-togethers, and activities all together because of these debilitating headaches. He had a low self-esteem, a fluency of just 27 in the 3rd grade, and he couldn't read or write particularly well. And although everything we did helped with the frequency of the headaches, we never actually got rid of them. He really and truly missed a lot of school because of his headaches. He was 8 by the time we sought medical care again, this time via a different doctor. He had missed six days of school for headaches, and we hadn't been in school but a couple of months. He had been struggling in school since kindergarten, and his quality of life left much to be desired. Our primary care physician, Dr. Beckman, took in our detailed information, our logs, medical history, Braden's charts, everything. Then he asked me if I had ever heard of Vision Therapy. My answer was a resounding 'no', but I didn't care. If it was going to help my son, then I was going to do it. Within days, we had appointments set to see if our son would be a good candidate for this type of therapy at Vision Development Center.

By the time we met Dr. Joan Bauernfiend, we were mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausted. (Insert first meltdown.) We had lived a very high stress life watching and logging Braden's every move, hoping he would give us insight to the triggers of his headaches. Our extended family had deemed us unsociable, and Braden was the 'kid who was always sick'. We were up to two hours of homework a night, we did not read for fun, and a mass of sick days were used. After that very first phone call with Miss Stephanie, I knew we were heading in a direction that could only benefit Braden. She didn't just pitch us a sales speech and rave about the business. She informed us of what Vision Therapy is and what it stood for. She asked about EVERYTHING, not just the things that were going wrong but also what was going right. She acknowledged our hard work, detailed notes, thoughts, and opinions. She contacted our insurance company on our behalf to help us determine their contribution. When a specific exclusion in our policy was found, Vision Development Center offered another financial option by partnering with a local bank. A meeting was set up with members of Braden's school to keep everyone in the loop of his progress. It was like a much needed, long awaited, warm hug. We were no longer alone. We had this little troop of soldiers that were bound and determined to give our son a better quality of life. We went into those first appointments not knowing anything and not truly understanding the process this path would take. What we found....was our salvation.

It wasn't easy at first. Braden didn't particularly care for the practicing of the 'work' at home. My husband had a hard time understanding that practicing wasn't the

same as perfecting, and for several months emotions ran high. Who am I kidding? With our family? Emotions are always high. It wasn't until I walked into the office after an extremely stressful week and listened to my son argue about what he was going to do and what he wasn't going to do that I began to question our decision for the first and only time. Braden was still having headaches, his behavior in the work room was not conducive to what his father and I expected of him, practicing at home just led to meltdowns, and I was exhausted from just trying to keep up with everything. (By this time, we were traveling to Jasper four times a week to continue to search for answers with Braden's headaches.) While I was debating our family's decisions, Miss Stephanie came out to the family room and sat with me, and I began to feel the tears. She said that after the third sigh, she just had to come out and see what was going on. Third sigh? Had I sighed three times? I couldn't even remember sighing once. And it was there, in that little room, that the healing process began. I was honest about how I felt the process was going; she was honest about Braden's progress at that point. Together our team formulated a plan for moving forward. That was the moment I realized that I needed to step back and let someone else do the work for Braden. Was I embarrassed that I had a meltdown during an appointment? Yep, you betcha! Would I change it if I had to do it over again? Nope!! I was simply going to wear my big girl pants, eat some chocolate, and let the healing ensue.

You see, that's the part of therapy they don't tell you about. How can they? It's different for everyone. For our family? We couldn't just drop Braden off and pick him up after an hour session was over. Our success was in the whole picture. Braden needed to know that he was worth waiting on and that the process was important to us. How was I supposed to know Braden wouldn't be the only one receiving therapy? Who knew that letting go of all the questions left unanswered would be so therapeutic?

While Dr. Joan worked her magic, I began to see change. I'd like to say it was subtle, but it was far from it. Dr. Joan didn't just stick to a list of activities, she LISTENED to Braden and saw him from a very different angle. Where was he struggling? Was it tracking? Scanning? Was he having a bad day? Was he super sensitive that day? Tired? She took every day....EVERY SINGLE DAY....with Braden and made it work in his favor. If something wasn't working or if she wasn't seeing the results, she tweaked, adjusted, and continued. She made it work FOR him. The result was AMAZING. Braden began to change, and he now enjoyed Vision Therapy. His fluency skyrocketed, he passed IREAD, he moved on to the 4th grade, and he picked up books and just started reading at home!!!! (I know, right?) He loved working with Dr. Joan and wouldn't leave without a hug because he was just so happy having fun. Were there tough days? Absolutely!! But, Dr. Joan would explain in terms Braden understood, and that was that. No dwelling, just moving forward.

As for Braden's headaches? As it turns out, there were a multitude of underlying issues, causing Braden's headache turmoil. Vision Therapy was an integral part in solving those issues. He now has headaches once every two or three months or so....maybe more during high allergy seasons, but I'll take that over the six headaches in a two week span that we were experiencing any day.

This is called 'Our Success Story' because that is just what it is....OUR success. Vision Therapy taught my husband and me to look at our son from a different perspective, and we are better parents because of it. Braden is a better student and a better version of himself because of it. I can't express the sheer joy of knowing that my child enjoys to read and has the confidence to do so. So, here is to you ladies....Thanks for being a part of our family's story. Know that all you do now and all you will do can forever change a person's life. Hugs!!!!