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Pediatric Partial Hospital Program Changes Family's Life

Elizabeth DaSilva looks through photos of her almost 4-year-old son, Austin, recollecting her family's nearly two year journey. She pauses—one shows Austin on his first birthday, his face and highchair covered in frosting.

"If he wanted to do this again... make that mess, I'd happily say, 'have at it, kid,'" she says.

Up until Austin approached 18 months, he loved food and trying new things. He was learning words: ma, dad, and Bella—his sister. He'd call for Chico, the family dog.

He was developing normally in every way. Until, suddenly, he wasn't.

Liz and her husband, Kevin, began noticing changes, starting with Austin restricting food. Then, his speech diminished and staring spells began. Austin stopped responding to his name.

"The entire time, I reported everything to our pediatrician," Liz says.

At 18 months, Austin would accept only three foods, and only from his mother. He was physically healthy, but his pediatrician referred him to a specialist, concerned about developmental disorders. An MRI and hearing test ruled out a brain tumor and hearing loss.

The family, who live in Attleboro, stayed in Massachusetts for Austin's evaluation. Days later, he was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and avoidant restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID).



Kevin, Austin, Liz and Bella DaSilva

"We had an answer, but I don't think we had a real sense for the deficits we were facing," Liz adds.

For the next eight months, Austin's food avoidance became more severe. Liz stopped cooking because the smells and sight of food would make Austin gag or vomit. Mealtime was spent doing anything to make Austin happy in the hope that he'd eat. Liz would play in the sandbox, or blow bubbles. Austin's gastroenterologist discussed a feeding tube, which frightened the DaSilvas.

Liz and Kevin connected with Hasbro Children's Hospital seeking nutritional guidance and to monitor Austin's weight. It was there that Liz learned about Bradley Hospital.

continued on page 2



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Austin today

Austin was put on the list for the Pediatric Partial Hospital Program, Bradley's family-centered, intensive day treatment program for very young children with serious emotional or behavioral challenges.

"A spot opened for him the day before preschool was starting. We put everything on hold to try it," says Liz. "I was with Austin at Bradley every step of the way."

Autism makes transitions difficult for Austin, and being nonverbal impacts communication. For the first week, he screamed entering Bradley before settling into a routine created by his compassionate care team.

"I can't tell you how welcoming Bradley was," says Liz.

John Boekamp, PhD, clinical director of the pediatric partial program, led Austin's care, which ran for six weeks, 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily.

Dr. Boekamp introduced behavior therapy principles of exposure, increasing tolerance and positive reinforcement with the goal of promoting and increasing proximity and acceptance to selected food offerings. Desensitizing Austin to food started slowly. Staff ate lunch in a room with him; Austin's first reaction was to face the wall. Then, he began to walk around, curiously.

In two weeks, Austin hit a goal – sitting when asked. Though he'd refuse meals, Austin was rewarded for sitting. Next, Austin's therapist would offer him a purée made specially for him. Tantrums turned to accepting three spoonfuls, then five, then many more.

Then, new foods were introduced. At first, Austin would lick, bite and, slowly, taste cucumbers and carrots. Mom and dad reinforced these techniques at home.

Four weeks in, Austin reached a major milestone – eating at a restaurant to celebrate grandma's birthday. It was his first time ever successfully eating out.

Dr. Boekamp helped Liz and Kevin understand their son's cues, empowering the couple to create positive associations at home after completing the partial program last November. Austin continues to see Dr. Boekamp on an outpatient basis to keep his progress strong.

"Bradley gave us our family back. I don't think this would have been possible without them."

— Liz DaSilva, Austin's mom

"Dr. Boekamp was compassionate, patient, and committed to helping Austin and our family," says Liz. "He'd meet with us sometimes two or three times a day. Austin really liked him – this is a man that was at my son's IEP meeting to advocate for him at his preschool."

Less than nine months after completing the partial program, Liz describes, "it was like a light switch went off for my son." He understands he has a meal structure, eats all foods and loves trying new things. The family enjoys meals together. Posters of food adorn the fridge and Austin uses his speech device to request snacks. There are no more purées and Austin now feeds himself.

"If he wants something not in the house, I'm now running out the door to get it," smiles Liz. "Bradley gave us our family back. I don't think this would have been possible without them."

Reunion Builds Community, Strengthens Support



Amy and Patrick Smith, OCD Reunion

Bradley Hospital's Intensive Program for Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) hosted its fourth annual reunion this past fall. The event was an inspirational gathering for past and present patients and their families, affording them the opportunity to support one another, share stories of struggle and triumph, and bond with Bradley staff members.

"When it comes to treating OCD, community-building and social connectedness are integral components of care," says Abbe Garcia, PhD, Clinical Director of our Pediatric Anxiety Research Center. "Our reunions encourage and facilitate both, which is why we're making them bigger and better each year."

Amy Smith and Katlyn "Kat" Hashway were among the featured speakers, and each shared how the program changed their lives and became their catalyst to help others.

Amy's 11-year-old son Patrick suffers from severe OCD. For him, doing everyday things that most people take for granted—like getting dressed independently or going to the bathroom unaided—were nearly impossible. As Amy says, "OCD can hold the whole family hostage if you let it. What we learned through Patrick's treatment freed us all."

In fact, Amy was so moved by the care Patrick received in the OCD program—and the strong sense of support she found there—that she stayed connected even after Patrick was discharged. In addition to participating in the reunions, Amy serves as Bradley's unofficial waiting room support group leader for parents and runs an invitation-only Facebook resource group.

Kat was diagnosed with OCD at 16. "I entered Bradley's program back in 2013, just two weeks after it started," she recalls, "so I guess I was among the first patients to understand how amazing it was." Kat says the program changed her life and that she feels "a million times better" because of it.

She credits her Bradley experience with being one of the things that motivated her to start ShalomAleichem, her mental health vlog on YouTube, which has more than 4,000 subscribers. "I started it about a year after completing the OCD program because I wanted to help others and I wanted that sense of community that I hadn't felt since I left Bradley," she says.

Approximately 200 people—some from as far away as Virginia and North Carolina—participated in the reunion, which included therapeutic art groups, educational breakout sessions, and fun activities like an ice cream social, photo booth, and karaoke.

A banner for the "Bravo Bradley" event. On the left is a stylized illustration of a dancer in a purple and red costume. In the center, the text "Hope through Dance" is written in a large, elegant, yellow script font, with "Bravo Bradley" in a smaller, bold, yellow sans-serif font below it. On the right, the text "SAVE THE DATE" is in bold red capital letters, followed by "JUNE 7, 2019" in bold red capital letters. At the bottom right, it says "Learn more at giving.lifespan.org/Bradley/Bravo". The background is dark with vertical light streaks.

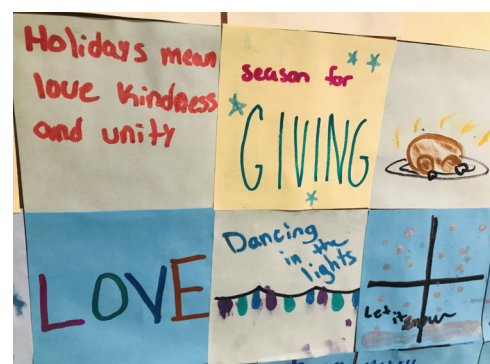
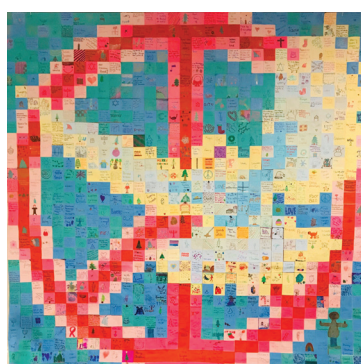
Healing Arts Makes Modern Mural

The healing arts are an important part of therapy at Bradley Hospital. They provide creative and therapeutic activities that improve and enhance the physical, mental and emotional well-being of patients. Art therapists also often bring the Bradley Hospital community together with collaborative projects.

During the months of November and December, clinicians and staff, patients and families, and people from partnering organizations came together in celebration of diversity and acceptance, sharing traditions and the

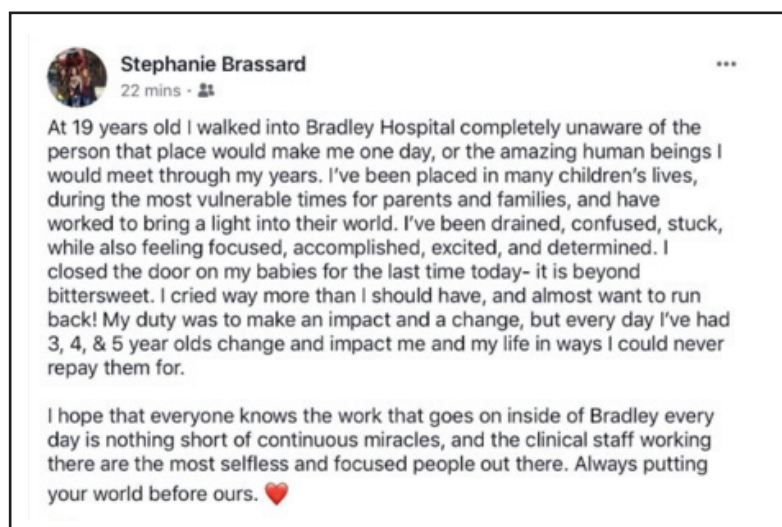
meaning of the holiday season on Post-it notes. The resulting mural, made of more than 1,000 Post-it notes with messages such as, “find a friend in tough times,” and “thinking of those who are no longer with us,” included seasonal symbols of peace and joy.

“Community art projects like this embody the heart of Bradley Hospital and are a visual reminder that bringing together diverse beliefs and individual struggles can result in something beautiful,” says hospital President Daniel Wall.



Never Far From Her Heart

Social media, at its best, is a platform for sharing good. To the right is a touching post from Stephanie Brassard on her last day of work at Bradley Hospital before beginning her new job as a behavior specialist in a public school. Stephanie worked in the Intensive Behavioral Treatment Program for more than five years.



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