

The Daily Item

SERVING THE NORTH SHORE SINCE 1877

Lynnfield family thankful for May Center

By Paul Halloran

November 15, 2022

When Giovanni Amico was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) at 18 months, his parents swung into action, getting him connected with early intervention services and actively seeking out an agency that could provide intensive ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis), a therapy based on the science of learning and behavior designed to increase language and social skills and decrease problem behaviors.

As they look back five years later, Lynnfield residents Samantha and Michael Amico are thankful they found the May Center for ABA Services in Wilmington.

"The May has challenged him more than other places would have," Michael Amico said.

Today, Giovanni is a first-grade student at the Huckleberry Hill School. He has 1-on-1 instruction in academic subjects and occupational and physical therapy, and is integrated for other activities. Non-verbal until he was 5, Giovanni is now fully verbal.

"We tried a lot of different things (to get him to communicate)," Samantha said. "The May never gave up. He's been talking for 2½ years."

Giovanni went to pre-school in Lynnfield when he was 3, but returned to the May Center for summer programming in 2019. When COVID-19 shut down schools in the spring of 2020, Giovanni went back to receiving full-time services from the May Center and his parents stayed with that when schools were reopening in the fall.

"He was already receiving home services from the May so we kept him there rather than have him go to kindergarten," Samantha Amico said. "That was one of the best decisions we made."

Giovanni remained at the May Center until this fall – though he still gets home

services – when he started school at Huckleberry Hill.

"Giovanni's language skills have taken off," said Samuel Shvarts, program director at the May Center for ABA Services, which provides therapy for children up to 10 years old. "The goal for every child is to teach them skills that help them thrive in their schools, homes and communities."

Because the Amicos had such a positive experience with the May Center with Giovanni, when their younger son, Lorenzo, was diagnosed with ASD at 18 months, they knew where to turn.

"We were lucky enough to immediately have somewhere to go," Samantha said. "We called the May right away."

Lorenzo, who is 4, has been receiving services since. During the height of the pandemic, Lorenzo and Giovanni were each receiving 20 hours of home services per week. They are grateful for the work of Rachel Brown and the therapists who currently work with their sons: Jennifer Nguyen, Nashville Anziani and Lauren Girroir.

"We were pretty excited to have the therapists come to our home," Samantha said.

For Lorenzo, who has excelled in the home and school settings, the challenges he faces are more in social settings. He attends pre-school at the Summer Street School in Lynnfield four days a week.

"When he started with us, Lorenzo had limited language and play skills," Shvarts said. "He has gone from 30 hours a week of services to four hours with a 1-on-1 and six hours in a group setting. He's in a regular-ed classroom and the reports we get are fabulous."

The Amicos, whose oldest son, 12-year-old Alexander, attends Lynnfield Middle School, said the collaboration between Lynnfield Public Schools and the May Center has been beneficial.



PHOTO | THE MAY CENTER

In the photo, from left: Lorenzo, Samantha, Michael, Giovanni and Alexander Amico.

"There's a great support system," Michael Amico said. "The people at the May can speak to the ABA people at the school in ways we can't. That makes a huge difference."

Shvarts said seeing the significant strides made by Giovanni and Lorenzo is gratifying for everyone at the May Center.

"They're an amazing family," he said. "Our goal is to help families remove barriers and that's what has happened with them. It's great to see how far both boys have come."

Michael Amico recalled once reading the notes of Giovanni's pediatrician, who wrote that "in my opinion, this child will never speak."

The Amicos weren't willing to settle for that and, thanks to a huge assist from the May Center, they didn't have to.