Jaxson Soler – Doing really, really well!

Samantha Soler’s son Jaxson held more than the usual surprises for a first-time mother. A robust little boy, he was so active that she did not realize his eyes had a slight degree of nystagmus, which caused his eyes to jump from side to side a lot. “I just thought I had a really alert little baby.” But at 2 months of age, his pediatrician referred her to a pediatric ophthalmologist for further testing. It turned out he had problems with his retinas. Samantha was pro-active about getting him the best help possible. A Fort Lauderdale native, her local connections included a friend who volunteered at the Lighthouse of Broward.

(Matthew Carabell – We Will Watch Him Grow!

The first thing Matthew Carabell wants to do with a new visitor is to show them the “man cave,” a small room full of his toys, carefully arranged on a table. He picks up his favorite, an airplane with a whirling propeller, and joins his Lighthouse teacher Cindy Wolke for his class. He has come a long way for a 3-year-old. Matthew’s parents have gone to great lengths to pave the way for the success he deserves.

Born in Colombia, Matthew’s parents noticed immediately that something was wrong with his eyes. A white film covered the front of his eyes. “It was a very emotional experience for us,” says mom Andrea, softly. A glaucoma specialist in Colombia began Matthew’s treatments. It was hard to assess what degree of vision he had and the family struggled with what to do for him. After 2 years of worrying about his care an opportunity opened up for the family to move to Florida. Dr. Nicole Patterson at Nova Southeastern University, The Eye Care Institute and pediatric ophthalmologists from Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, confirmed the diagnosis of glaucoma and a new treatment plan was in place. Dr. Patterson referred the family to the Lighthouse of Broward (LHOB) about 6 months ago.

(Matthew Carabell hard at play!

(Jaxson Soler and Cindy Wolke

(continued on Page 3.)
As we head into summer with all the great Lighthouse camp activities for school age children and teens, we feature two fantastic three year olds in this newsletter.

The strong families raising these young boys have a continuous set of programs at the Lighthouse to support their sons emotionally, physically, spiritually and intellectually as they become strong young men. We know they will be competing in the workplace and enjoying their own families someday—and the way time flies, 2035 is just not beyond our imaginations!

One of the benefits of my job is that I get to interview folks for our newsletter and watch what the Lighthouse staff has accomplished. These conversations are precious to me and all the more so because it is so obvious that the wonderful Lighthouse professionals go above and beyond their basic job duties every day to show the people we serve real caring, compassion—and love. You can see it on their faces and it shows in the pictures.

Everyone at the Lighthouse is making client success their lifetime commitment. When it comes to babies who are blind or visually impaired, that is all important. The three year olds of today, will need the Lighthouse for a long, long time.

Samantha Soler told me, “I’m looking forward to when Jaxson can come to the Lighthouse Summer Camp.” When I told her about our program for teens, she was amazed that the Lighthouse offered that, too. The Lighthouse makes a lifetime commitment to these babies.

Speaking of “lifetime;” May is Older Americans Month. So I’m putting a photo of our oldest client into the newsletter. Happy 107th birthday, Rose Bender. Rose recently got a replacement electronic magnifier. She’s still living in her own apartment and occasionally makes a cheerful phone call to us at the Lighthouse. She also is a faithful annual donor and has remembered the Lighthouse in her will.

It’s nice to know we are all in this together.

Executive Director
Jaxson Soler – Doing Really, Really Well! (continued from Page 1.)

Samantha called Lighthouse of Broward and set up an appointment for Jaxson to be evaluated. Jaxson started working with Cindy Wolke, LHOB’s early intervention specialist, when he was only 2 years old. He already was in a pre-school. Samantha explains, “I know Temple Beth Torah and a lot of the teachers have been there for 30 years. I just asked them if they could include Jaxson with the other kids, and they said ‘no problem.’ They have adapted the program and the other children are benefitting from the experience of being with Jaxson as well. He has a lot of friends.”

With over 200 genetic combinations of retinal dystrophy, it isn’t clear yet which one Jaxson has, but gene-mapping results should be coming soon. Meanwhile, Jaxson wants to play! He prefers small toys because his field of vision is very narrow, it is like looking through a straw, only small things fit into the area he can see.

Jaxson is a “happy, rambunctious little boy.” He runs into his pre-school classroom and spies a bright yellow balloon and tosses it into the air. He loves swimming and building things with Legos. He also loves animals—a classroom visitor brought in animals and “he pet the snake and the tarantula,” says Cindy, with barely concealed horror. Mom says his vivid imagination allowed him to enjoy the zoo even though he could not see the animals—he simply described what he imagined.

“I’m looking forward to when Jaxson can go to the Lighthouse Camp,” says his mom, “and continue with the Lighthouse through high school. I want him to be with other visually impaired children and without having to just use his imagination—I know the Lighthouse will give him that kind of real life experience.”

Samantha speaks with total confidence and pride that her son is “doing really, really well.”

If someone you know has a visual impairment, let them know that the Lighthouse of Broward is ready to serve them. The Lighthouse helps individuals of all ages and at all levels.

Check us out.

www.LHOB.org
We Will Watch Him Grow! (continued from page 1.)

In early May, LHOB’s Early Intervention Specialist, Cindy Wolke gave the parents the good news that Matthew is functioning at his age appropriate level and his language skills are good in both English and Spanish. “We want him to be bilingual—it is important that he will be able to speak to his grandparents, as well as his classmates here, and we want him to know both cultures,” says dad, Francisco, beaming with pride for his son.

Matthew attends special needs pre-school and is in the highest level class. “He is the leader” of his group and he fully enjoys school.

“I won!” Matthew cries joyfully as he races through Cindy’s puzzles. Matthew adjusts to change easily. His new eyeglasses, which were prescribed using electronic testing of his retinas, are a huge help. No longer does he pull them off his face in frustration and his balance and walking is better.

Matthew truly has a winner’s personality and the staff of the Lighthouse Programs for Babies, Children and Teens is looking forward to watching him grow – with us!

As part of the Lighthouse Teens Program, our teens participated in the Feeding South Florida stocking and package preparation.

Ten thousand meals, (9985 to be exact,) were prepared by our Teens. This opportunity helped them grow in their knowledge of the community and gave them some terrific work experience. Well done!!