



# FROM THE Heart

*Where we see your children with our hearts  
and address their needs with our minds.*

2016 - 2017

## ISAAC – MY JOURNEY

*“I was so proud of myself as I stood on the stage with everyone smiling up at me upon my accomplishment. I was receiving the M.O.D.E.L. student award for showing signs of leadership, but this wasn't the beginning of my journey.”*

So begins Isaac's college essay – the essay that ultimately helped him achieve admittance to the University of Georgia, where he will begin college this August. Isaac's parents, Diane & Stuart knew early on that Isaac was not typical -- he would not lay down, preferred to sleep in a car seat and he did not startle. After reporting concerns to the doctor on several visits, he finally prescribed testing. It was the first time they had heard the word autism. Isaac was 2.

Isaac's essay continues: *“It began in a place with no communication, living in a world of silence from the great hindrance of suffocating autism. I couldn't talk until the age of four, or read until the age of nine. In fact, the doctors informed my parents that I wouldn't be able to advance past the mind of a five year old. They called it impossible.”*

Diane & Stuart refused to believe in the impossible. “We are going to show them” was Diane's constant mantra. The family began on the rounds with specialists: speech, occupational therapy, Floortime, and more. They found trusted professionals and stayed true to the methods suggested and never searched treatments on the internet. The family did not go out or to restaurants for years and would not put Isaac in environments that created frustration or were overwhelming. They would play on the floor for hours, following Isaac's lead- waiting patiently. Isaac would have a surge, and then a plateau.

Once Isaac started at Lionheart in the fall of 2003, his specialists felt strongly that the new school environment was providing Isaac with the support he needed. Isaac's early years at Lionheart mirrored a computer. “You know how your computer gets too much junk in it, and it freezes - that was Isaac. At Lionheart, we learned the importance of the developmental pyramid; if one of the pieces of the pyramid is not in place, everything else collapses.”

Isaac began learning how to process sensory information, situations and emotions that once caused him to freeze and shut down. As Isaac moved up the pyramid, the teachers added new skills and goals to his individualized plan. Diane & Stuart knew that Lionheart



understood Isaac, “The relationship between families and Lionheart is one of patience, trust, and partnership. Lionheart informed, guided, and taught not only Isaac, but our whole family on how to overcome challenges.”

In his college essay, Isaac describes his journey this way: *“Everything was a challenge, even the things that one might take for granted, like looking your own mother in the eye, or being able to express one's needs and wants. But the great hindrances made the small achievements that much greater and made them have more meaning. It was the kind of meaning where I could finally read after nine years of anticipation with a joy so genuine I would sit in my room for hours at a time in a whole new realm of creativity and fascination. So, as I stepped off the stage with my award, I reflected on the journey so far and how thankful I am for the gift of perspective to accompany me on the rest of the trip. I did not ask for autism, and neither did millions of others, but I do not allow for this to define me in a negative light. Instead, I continue my journey to help others see themselves as more than just on the overwhelming spectrum.”*

At Lionheart, we are grateful for the partnership of families like Isaac's, who trust and believe in our mission. We know there is so much more to Isaac's journey, and wish all the best to this Lionheart alum as he enters this next phase at the University of Georgia.

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HEART & SOUL  
ANNUAL LIONHEART AUCTION



Lionheart's Wine Tasting and Auction has been a critical fundraiser since our first year in 2000. This year was no exception! Our guests enjoyed wine tasting, bidding, dancing, and mingling, and we raised over \$200,000 to support the mission of Lionheart.







**THANK YOU TO OUR 2016 PARTNERS & SPONSORS**

- Alpharetta Convention Visitor's Bureau
- Ceviche Alpharetta
- Current Hub
- Renasant Bank
- Springfree Trampoline
- Whole Foods Avalon

Grilling & Gridiron is becoming a premier event in Alpharetta, celebrating the longstanding tailgating tradition in the South. Grilling, tasting, drinking craft beer, and enjoying college football on the big screen benefits Lionheart. Thank you to our 2016 partners and sponsors.

# Community with Heart



The North Fulton Rotaract Club organized April Fool's Fest, a comedy festival at Gate City Brewing in Roswell. Over 200 people gathered to listen to comics, sample beer, and raise critical funds for Lionheart!

Members of the Alpharetta Rotary Club donated their time and a \$2,000 grant to prepare the Gardens for spring planting. Roswell Rotary also provided a generous grant to support our Lionheart for Life program.



Longtime Lionheart supporter Tom Williams donated a portion of the proceeds from his exhibition at Spruill Gallery to Lionheart during the month of April. Tom and his wife Susie have also donated fabulous Tuscany inspired wine dinners in their beautiful art filled home to our auction. Tom's art work and generosity are remarkable!



# Partnerships with Heart



**Over 100 golfers played in the Jack Emmerson Memorial Golf Tournament sponsored by the Ambassadors of Trophy Club of Atlanta. All proceeds benefit the Lionheart WORKS program at The Lionheart School through American Golf Foundation.**

Leadership North Fulton, an annual program through the Greater North Fulton Chamber of Commerce, develops leaders in North Fulton by promoting community awareness, instilling civic responsibility, and building relationships. Each year the class breaks into teams that partner with area nonprofits to accomplish projects designed to have lasting benefits for the community. This year, Team Legacy chose a project to create a room divider in the multipurpose room so that more than one group can utilize the space at time, acquire core building and cardio equipment for students, and provide shelving and storage for supplies in the room.

Team members planned the project with input from occupational therapists and teachers at Lionheart, and engaged the community for sponsorships and donations for the project. The team described the impact, "By completing this project, we got the opportunity to help the school turn a big, somewhat unorganized space into a very structured, functional area for the students. This experience left an impact on us and we hope the enhanced space contributes to the lasting legacy of Lionheart."

Past projects that Lionheart collaborated with Leadership North Fulton on include an outdoor classroom in Wills Park, new raised garden beds, and a shade structure at Lionheart Gardens.

*Team Legacy includes Jon Copsey, Marketing Manager for Chattahoochee Nature Center; Craig Easterwood, Deputy Police Chief for the City of Roswell; Peggie Morrow, Marketing Manager for Morrow Family Medicine; Beth Papetti, Vice President of Operations - Hospital Division for WellStar Medical Group, and Morgan Ruggiero, CPA at Frazier & Deeter.*



# Heart Art with

Playing the violin for the first time, bouncing paint filled tennis balls to make collaborative artwork, improvising scenes with the drama teacher, creating textile collages and unique pottery – all of these experiences brightened the faces and sparked the imaginations of students at The Lionheart School this year.

Lionheart Head of School, Elizabeth Dulin says, “Students can learn abundantly through art experiences-- appropriate reactions, reading emotions, creativity, spontaneity, cooperation, problem solving, confidence, flexibility, critical thinking. We love partnering with local artists to bring a greater exposure to the arts to our students.” Some of the arts highlights this year:



*“Students can learn abundantly through the art experiences.”*

*Artist Sabre Esler helped celebrate the arts at Lionheart by donating two art pieces to Lionheart, and completing a similar project with the students. Sabre’s work is showcased in galleries throughout the country as well as in corporate and private collections.*



*The Northwestern Middle School 8th grade orchestra, led by Mrs. Champion, came and played a concert for students at Lionheart as part of their “Giving Bach” community program. Orchestra members worked with Lionheart students after the concert to help them explore the instruments. One student proclaimed, “That was cool! I never played a violin before!”*



*LionheARTisans, a cottage industry that provides students at The Lionheart School the experience of a small business environment that combines academic and vocational skills, is thriving. The goal of the program is to utilize and repurpose donated and available materials to create marketable items and teach valuable time management and project-based skills.*



*Erik Lingvall and other actors from Catapult Acting Studios lead our students in drama exercises weekly, including improvisation and role playing to foster reciprocity, creative thinking, problem solving and affect-driven fun!*



# Henry

## *Student Profile*



The saying is true, "If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism." Our son Henry came into the world healthy and seemingly typically developing. He was always a rather high-needs, strong-willed child but we liked that about him and couldn't wait to see how that would play out later in life. Just after his third birthday, Henry was diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS). Henry's tantrums, an extreme need for consistency, an inability to communicate his needs/wants with us, hours of non-imaginative and repetitive play with the same trains, and lack of interest in people other than his family were our new normal.

Henry's education and therapies were dichotomous; he did a great job in therapy but without anyone to facilitate those skills in the classroom, they weren't taking root. We dreamed of finding a setting where both educational and therapeutic needs could be addressed. We were looking for an environment where Henry's special gifts would be acknowledged and fostered while working on his challenges in a loving, respectful way.

I can still remember Elizabeth's words about addressing the needs of each child during the tour at Lionheart and trying my hardest to hold back tears until I could get to the car to call George. I knew in my heart immediately that this was the place for us. Lionheart understood the need for meeting the child where they are and acknowledging the many factors involved in learning. So often, we found that the goals for children on the spectrum

were simply to act/learn/do as a neurotypical child would. It was refreshing to hear the various ways Lionheart focused on each child individually and set their goals to align with the child's strengths and interests.

We made the decision to enroll for the 2016-17 school year and it has been one of the greatest gifts we have been able to give Henry as his parents. From the first day of the year to the last, Henry has been excited to go to school. You can tell by the smile on his face when he sees his teachers that he feels safe and cherished. The growth we have seen in our son is remarkable. He has grown leaps and bounds in language/conversational skills, sensory regulation, desire to interact with others and academic skills. There have been difficult days (and weeks) when Henry struggles; however, he is met with consistent boundaries, encouragement and praise. Whether he is in the classroom, riding his favorite horse during hippotherapy, or playing on the playground, there is clear continuity in the way the staff works with him towards becoming his best self.

We've found ourselves relaxing quite a bit this year and our anxieties about Henry's future don't feel so overwhelming. While it will still be a challenging road ahead, knowing that we have found a positive, safe place that dedicates itself to the growth and well-being of these special children feels like a dream come true. It is apparent the minute you walk in the door of Lionheart that it is bursting at the seams with love for their students, empathy for their struggles, joy in their triumphs and tireless determination to push past barriers.

-George and Katie Waugh



# Give with Heart

## IN MEMORIUM

*Lionheart teacher Abigail Mapes' grandmother, Anita Mapes, passed away last year, and her family designated Lionheart as the beneficiary of gifts given in memory of Anita. Many in the Mapes family are long-time supporters of Lionheart, and we are grateful for their generosity. Thank to those who made gifts in Anita's memory:*

Joan Aeschbach  
Laurie & Paul Bauer  
Vicki & Hugh Beattie  
Lucy Beattie  
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*We are grateful to those who supported the Lionheart WORKS program:*

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*The Lionheart School thanks the following individuals, companies, foundations, and groups who have who have supported Lionheart during the 2016-17 year.*

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