



MAURICE SNELL

EASTER SEALS – CHICAGO

Maurice Snell has beaten the odds. A young man living with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has achieved his college degree and a job. For many with autism spectrum disorder, such achievements are beyond reach. Maurice, however, exhibits milder effects of the complex neurological disorder. Despite that advantage, Maurice's future was uncertain for most of his childhood. Before his first birthday, his parents, Jennifer and Willie, noticed a change.

"He had been a happy baby," Jennifer says. "Then he stopped talking and making sounds. He just stopped."

For years Maurice was nonverbal, and no one had an answer until, at age six, he was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. The Snells soon had many more questions. An immediate concern was how best to help their son succeed in school. When Maurice was seven, they visited what today is the Easter Seals Autism Therapeutic School. It's a place where students with autism spectrum disorder, ages 3 to 22 receive not only an education, but also speech, language and communication therapy, occupational therapy, social work services, health related services, recreational services, and more.

"We walked in and knew it was right," Jennifer says. "That's when Maurice just took off. We could see a change in him the first week."

During Maurice's 10 years at the school, a team of professionals helped him develop his speech, language and communication skills, and his social skills. He learned to swim and play baseball, and competed in the Special Olympics. And his parents were active in a growing support group of parents.

"Easter Seals Metropolitan Chicago really became part of our family," Jennifer says. "Maurice was so happy to be there. He loved it."

Unlike many of his peers with autism spectrum disorder, Maurice has strong cognitive skills, which make it easier for him to learn. With the foundation Easter Seals Metropolitan Chicago provided, by his sophomore year, he was able to transfer to the public high school where his mother taught. He thrived there, graduating 13th in his class and earning a 3.8 grade point average.

In May 2006, Maurice was "emotional and ecstatic" to receive his bachelor's degree from Saint Xavier University in Chicago, with a major in Liberal Studies and minors in Spanish and Concert Band. Maurice has said his dream would be to work for Easter Seals. That dream came true when he was hired to be a classroom aide and mentor at his former school. Since 2007, Maurice has worked as Administrative Assistant at Easter Seals Metropolitan Chicago's Autism Therapeutic School and Center for Autism Research. In Late April of 2013, Maurice became the Development Coordinator for Easter Seals Metropolitan Chicago in the Central Office after working for many years as Administrative Assistant at Easter Seals Autism Therapeutic School.