

miriam
SCHOOL and LEARNING CENTER

Our community. Their stories.

Welcome to the Miriam Journey.

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FROM MEG BAMFORD, HEAD OF MIRIAM



The Miriam journey is many things to many people. For some, it's catching up to grade level in reading. For others, it's making their first real friend. All Miriam students gain both confidence and competence. Students learn to believe in themselves and then are open to learning new things, taking risks and working to be the best version of themselves.

I am so excited for you to read these stories from the Miriam Community. They are stories of strength and resilience, recounted by parents and grandparents who simply want to see their kids happy and successful - whatever that might look like for each individual. While everyone comes from a different place and with varying strengths and challenges, you'll see a few themes woven through these stories.

We strive to empower our students and ultimately to help change the trajectory of their lives. These personal stories our families have chosen to share are powerful reminders of what's possible when students are supported and celebrated.

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JONAS' STORY

- Kara, Jonas' mom

"It's such a relief to know that Jonas is accepted for exactly who he is."

Good education has always been a top priority of mine, because I am a certified teacher (now stay-at-home mom) and had studied in college how important early childhood education and experiences really are. We bought a house in a good school district before we even had kids.

When you have kids, you know that there will be parenting struggles, but you assume that your child's life will be pretty similar to every other child's.

You never think about autism being part of the plan.

Jonas started struggling at age 18 months with language. We weren't worried, but we put him into speech therapy. By age 2, he started struggling intensely. He had lots of anxiety about almost everything. Jonas was diagnosed with autism, ADHD and anxiety at age 3.

He started his local school district with an IEP at age 3, and I also enrolled him in as many therapies as I possibly could. He started making great progress, but I knew he needed more than our local district could provide.

During his IEP meetings, I would ask for more services for Jonas and was constantly denied. I asked for a sensory diet for Jonas throughout his school day, because he came home each and every day so dysregulated. I was told they didn't have the resources to provide more accommodations.





In addition to being super dysregulated, he showed anxiety about school in different ways. He constantly chewed on items throughout his school day. He would scream when it was time for school. Once he was at school though, he did "OK" because Jonas is good at masking. Even though he was so full of anxiety, he could still get through a school day. Jonas is also SO smart, so the district told us that he was doing just fine.

I knew, though, that he would not thrive at all in a setting of one teacher to 25 kids or more. While Jonas was still in preschool, I knew our dream school for kindergarten would be Miriam.

It seemed like Miriam was designed for kids just like my son.

I knew he would benefit from the small class sizes, the individualized therapy and the individualized learning.

Our final decision maker was during his last IEP meeting of his preschool year. When I asked about kindergarten for Jonas, I didn't like the answers I was getting. When I asked what would happen if Jonas struggled in kindergarten, I was told he would repeat kindergarten – which I didn't like, because he was way too smart for that.

I worried at first even with sending him to Miriam, because he had a never had a full day at school and I just hoped he wouldn't struggle. Miriam's staff has been beyond accommodating. If he gets tired in the school day (especially at the beginning of the school year), they let Jonas sleep. At the beginning of the school year, he had issues staying in his desk (and at one point would STAND on his desk) due to his ADHD, so they provided alternative seating for him.

Miriam's sensory diet is HUGE for him - he comes home happy and regulated. When Jonas started throwing his lunch away at lunchtime because he was overstimulated, they came up with a plan for him to eat with a staff member so he wouldn't be overstimulated and to make sure he ate.

Every day, Jonas is happy to go to school, and the staff is happy to see him – and his needs are never treated like a burden.

He thrived in his kindergarten year. He LOVES going to school.

I can't even tell you what a relief it is to know your child is not only OK at school, but thriving. I don't have to worry about him at school – I know he's in the best hands. He has grown so much this year, because Miriam teaches the entire child.





He has grown emotionally, socially and academically.
It blows me away, to be honest! It's such a relief to know that Jonas is accepted for exactly who he is, while also being encouraged by Miriam staff to be the best version of himself possible.

I wake up every single day grateful for Miriam and what you have done for my son.

And thank you for making your school accessible to all families from all socioeconomic backgrounds. It's truly worth the 25-minute drive to school. We would drive an hour to get there if we had to!

STARLIT'S STORY

~ Jessica, Starlit's Mom

"Her confidence is back, and so is her sparkling personality."

We all face many challenges in life, and our family has definitely had our fair share.

When I think about these challenges and start to feel overwhelmed, I always come back to a quote by Fred Rogers that inspires me:

"When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'"

A lot of people say their children saved their lives. In my case, this is true in more ways than one. As a first-time mother, I found out while pregnant with my daughter Starlit that I was sick with an environmental cancer. I was told that if I had not been pregnant, they may not have found my cancer in time to save me.

I was determined then to do whatever was best for my daughter, no matter what. At that time, this meant I would win this battle so I could watch her grow.

I started chemotherapy when my daughter was 3 weeks old. Little did I know this was only the beginning of a very long journey that included years of chemotherapy, radiation, a bone marrow transplant, and seven surgeries by the time I turned 36, just this year.

I was grateful that as an infant, Starlit was in good health. However, around 8 months old, I started to get concerned when I noticed she wasn't babbling or meeting her communication milestones. By the time she was 1, Starlit began her speech therapy journey. Between ages 3 and 4, she was still nearly unintelligible and was diagnosed with speech/language disorders, including apraxia, plus ADHD and sensory processing differences.



Even after her years in Head Start, preschool, and after-school therapies, Starlit continued to struggle. Despite my strong advocacy for my daughter and having an IEP for two years, public school still couldn't support her needs. This caused a lot of frustration. I didn't feel valued as an IEP team member or heard as a parent. The whole process was exhausting, especially for a mother going through cancer treatments. I was so stressed that I couldn't focus on getting healthy.

I watched my child's confidence start to fade, and her personality began to lose its sparkle. She hadn't even reached kindergarten yet; I knew I had to find a better answer. This led me to Miriam.

I researched their educational program and instantly knew it would be a perfect fit for my daughter!

I observed my daughter during her trial days at Miriam and met the staff. I was so impressed that I literally broke down in tears of happiness at finally finding an environment where my daughter could truly thrive. I couldn't help but wonder what a difference a school like this would have made for me as a child.





After her second trial day, Starlit's father and I asked her what she thought of Miriam, and she said, "I like it; I get to be myself, and they understand me."

We knew right then and there that we had to figure out a way to enroll Starlit at Miriam. No matter what obstacles our family faced, like the economy or the fact that I would need to drive 45 minutes to get her to school each day, we had to make this work because attending Miriam was what was best for our daughter.

This ended up being the best decision we ever made, and we haven't looked back.

At Miriam, the teachers were always approachable, friendly and energetic, and Starlit has developed a strong bond with them. They have really taken the time to get to know her and understand how she learns.

Her teachers are passionate about adapting lessons for different learning styles and genuinely focus on Starlit's unique social, emotional, physical and academic needs in their planning. The ILP developed for Starlit was goal-oriented and appropriate.

I was completely amazed at all the work the team put into preparing such a comprehensive plan. It was a relief knowing that Starlit would receive support in all the areas she needed, even in ways we hadn't realized she needed.

I love the small classes at Miriam and that they roup kids based on compatibility rather than just their grade. Miriam has made every accommodation possible, leveling the playing field so Starlit can reach her full potential.

They meet her where she is, which builds confidence while still challenging her to grow. This shows her that she is capable of great things!



Having Starlit's therapy taken care of at school has been a game changer. It has given us back precious family time and allows her to just be a kid, as she no longer has to get therapies after school or on weekends.

The Occupational Therapy Program has been a blessing. Starlit looks forward to starting each day with a sensory diet! The therapists lead sessions that have shown her the impact movement has on her ability to learn, making learning fun and engaging. This has helped her improve her fine and gross motor skills, sensory integration, and has made a positive impact on her academics. It's beautiful to see Starlit so engaged and active in her education now!

I'm especially thankful for the Speech/Language Therapy Program. The pathologists took the time to truly understand Starlit's needs and created a tailored treatment plan that fit her well. The best part is that they collaborate closely with Starlit's teachers to foster effective communication throughout the school day. Because of this, Starlit has made major strides!

In just the first year, her speech/language improved significantly. She started to articulate er emotions, communicate her needs, and use the social skills and tools she learned at Miriam outside of the school environment!

Starlit just finished her second year at Miriam and thriving! She looks forward to school each day, truly loves learning again and is doing so much better academically!

Her confidence is back, and so is her sparkling personality. Miriam has not only been transformative for my child but has also been incredibly supportive of our entire family.

I highly recommend Miriam to any parent of a unique learner, I know it's hard but don't give up advocating. No matter where life takes us, we will always feel proud to be part of the Miriam family!

THATCHER'S STORY

- Emma, Thatcher's Mom

"We are so thankful Miriam is in St. Louis!"

Thatcher was 6 years old and entering first grade when he started school at Miriam. We decided to have him go to Miriam because the Montessori school he had been attending wasn't working out for him.

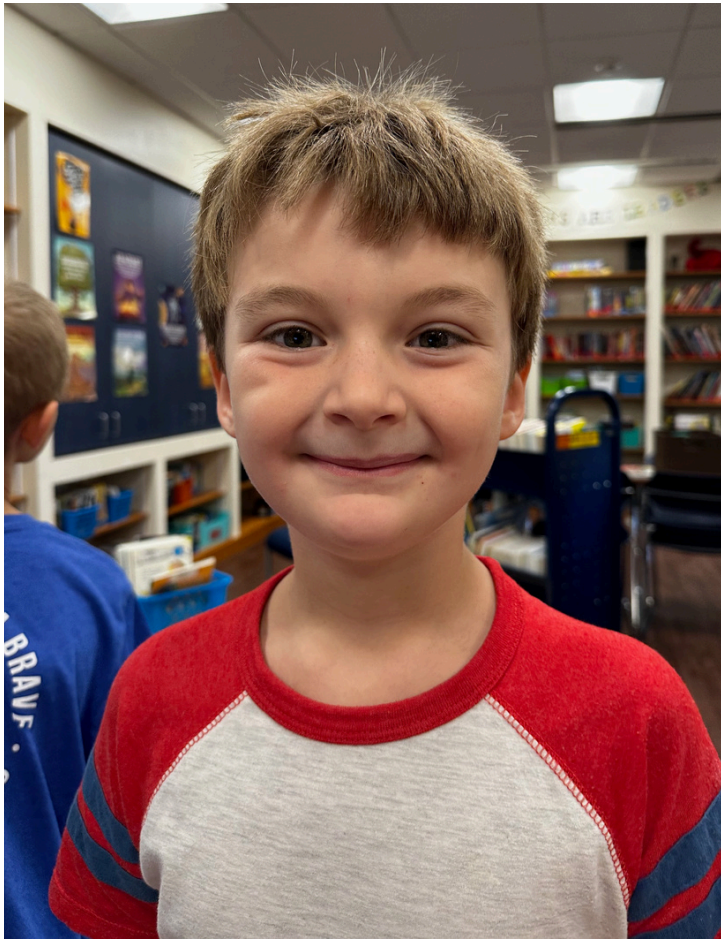
He was growing frustrated by not being able to understand what was being taught in the classroom, as the style of teaching was not what he needed. There was a lack of understanding about children with ADHD or learning challenges.

As we looked at where else he could go to school we knew he wouldn't get the support he would need at public school at that time. I began asking around and we learned about Miriam from Thatcher's occupational therapist.

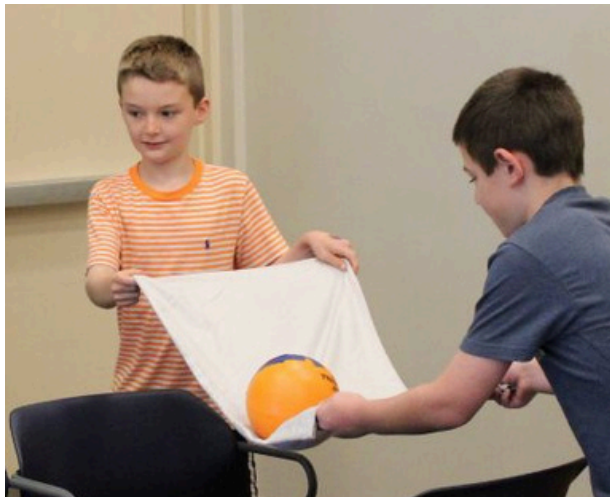
Miriam has been incredible for Thatcher!

When he entered Miriam, he was unable to identify letters and wasn't writing - he can now read and is able to write. It has been truly amazing to watch what three years at Miriam and the support there has done for him!

Along with the academic progress Thatcher has made, the social and emotional changes have also been profound.







When he first arrived at Miriam he had trouble being in class all day, and changes in schedule were incredibly hard for him. But as he has learned to work with his big emotions, he is able to focus and enjoys class now.

I think the hand therapy and reading support have really helped Thatcher, as well as the ability for him to work at his own pace and be celebrated for his successes.

When he first got to Miriam, he really benefited from the sensory support with the OT room and the ability to move his body as he needed. As he has gotten older, I see how academically he is ready to transition out of Miriam, he is reading and loves math.

Socially, he is excited to be in a larger classroom and I think he's able to navigate friendships and relationships in an informed and age-appropriate way. He loves to play with peers, and Minecraft is a favorite!

Thatcher will be attending a local public school, and we know if it's not a fit, Miriam is always here for him.

Finley, one of Thatcher's younger brothers, is starting at Miriam as a kindergartner, and we are happy to know he will be in a place that will be able to meet his needs. Finley is 5, and because of his sensory needs and energy/emotions mirroring Thatcher, we know starting him at Miriam for early support will be the best for him.

As a parent, I feel a sense of calm and confidence having Thatcher at Miriam and now sending Finley to Miriam.

This is a school that is well equipped to help children who need extra time, energy and understanding. We are so thankful Miriam is in St. Louis!

BARRETT'S STORY

- Courtney and Brennan, Barrett's parents

"Miriam has been like a warm hug that has allowed Barrett to flourish."

When Barrett started elementary school, we realized she would need more support than her current environment was providing.

When she started at Miriam School in second grade, we quickly saw her confidence begin to increase.

Barrett has been diagnosed with both dyslexia and anxiety. Her severe dyslexia impairs not just reading, but also other subjects. She needs repetition and explanation when it comes to understanding new language and applying concepts.

Her anxiety makes it difficult for Barrett to feel comfortable engaging with others, and she is working on becoming a better advocate for herself.

Miriam has been like a warm hug that has allowed Barrett to flourish socially, while constantly being supported and challenged academically.

Now beginning her third year at Miriam, Barrett is benefitting daily from the individualized approach to instruction and the built-in therapies.

Her willingness to try new things and confidence in herself has grown significantly since starting at Miriam.







Miriam teachers and staff have taken time to understand her as a person and a learner, what she needs to grow, determine goals and put plans in place to help her grow toward those goals.

Ellen Burke, Barrett's teacher for the 2023-24 academic year, told us a smile automatically comes to her face when she hears Barrett's name. Ellen said she is inherently kind, and she has watched her blossom through social skills classes and daily interactions with other students.

We appreciate the simple approach Miriam takes – meeting students where they are and helping them succeed. They don't hesitate to give each and every student what they need.

No games, red tape, qualifications – just giving kids what they need to learn and grow.

Also, the collaboration between Miriam teachers and therapists is wonderful – and so important to ensure there are no gaps in learning. We can tell the teachers understand the crucial role relationships play in learning, and they use their knowledge and experience to develop a close relationship with each student. It is inspiring.

Barrett says Miriam is a fun, kind and happy place. We would add that Miriam is loving, inclusive, genuine, united and welcoming.

When we walk in the school, we see and feel an energy that is all about kids, and we love that.

MAX'S STORY

- Stacia, Max's Mom

"No one is judging him."

I knew Max wasn't fitting in at school. We had tried two different - really good - schools, but it just wasn't working. Max would melt down before school, and melt down after school. He was made fun of at school. He stopped getting invited to things. The teachers said it must be our fault.

It was a very lonely time for Max and our family.

After a recommendation, we applied at Miriam, and Max was signed up to shadow for a few days. After day 1, he came out of the school with a smile on his face, so happy, saying he had loved it. And that wasn't typical for Max. He has massive social anxiety, and unknowns are so scary for him. But he wanted to go back the next day.

Max started at Miriam in fourth grade - in 2023 - and today he is like a different kid.

His social anxiety, ADHD and sensory processing disorder made it difficult for Max to adapt to a traditional classroom. Social cues are difficult for him, and his sensory challenges would cause him to get overwhelmed and shut down.

At Miriam, all of these concerns are valid and understood. We are all working together as a team to help Max overcome his challenges, and to provide him with coping strategies that he can use when things get overwhelming. No one is judging him.



The sensory diet at Miriam has been amazing for Max. Being able to regulate his system first thing in the morning so he can focus on his schoolwork has been huge for him!

Max has made great strides with his empathy, and he is able to help other friends with their own challenges. He now engages with others, participating in birthday parties and even in community events.

Before, Max had no self-confidence or self-esteem. Now, he has both! He's HAPPY. He's smiling and silly, and we never got to see that side of him before Miriam.

Tough days are few and far between now, but if he does come home upset, he will share with me immediately. Before, he would just cry, and we had no idea why.

Miriam has been a game-changer for us, in terms of our day-to-day family lifestyle. We were walking on eggshells around Max - but that is not the case anymore.

We can work through struggles together. He is learning to advocate for himself and his needs. Instead of teachers saying,





'It's not our problem,' everyone comes together to figure out how we can help Max.

It's a feeling of support. My husband and I never feel like we're on our own island.

In fact, the community is one of the things that makes Miriam so special. For one thing, everybody knows his name. When we drive up to drop him off, it doesn't matter what teacher or staff member is there to open the door, but they all know him and greet him with a smile. It makes him feel good - like he's somebody.

Miriam is a place where you don't feel alone, where you are not judged, and where you are given support in any way that's needed. It's a wonderful place to learn and grow with others who are going through something similar. You feel like you're part of a community, and that is so important.

Sometimes, you feel so lost with your child, and all you want is to see success. And I do see success with Max right now. It's slow sometimes, but it's working.

These children have so much to give the world; they just need to be given the skills - and Miriam does that.

JACK'S STORY

- Sarah, Jack's Mom

"He is comfortable in his own skin and is willing to try new things."

If I had to sum up Jack's Miriam journey, it would be that it has truly been life changing for our entire family.

Jack's journey at Miriam began in August 2023, in fifth grade. It quickly made such a difference in his schooling and his life.

Jack's challenges are largely social and emotional. He struggles to engage with peers and would often attempt to get their attention in odd ways. He needed explicit instruction regarding how to interact with others, and he just wasn't getting it. His lack of friends bothered him, and it was heartbreaking.

Those challenges started to also affect Jack's academics. He had accommodations in place at school, but he wasn't making progress toward his goals.

It became evident that his teachers didn't have an accurate picture of what Jack was capable of - largely based on his refusals to read aloud or attempt to answer questions. He did not feel comfortable taking any risks.

Jack hated school - with a passion. He would do just about anything he could think of to get out of going. Throughout fourth grade, there were lots of tears, and days when they had to physically remove him from the car in the morning.





Jack's lack of progress both social-emotionally and academically led us to consider sending him to Miriam. We had actually looked into it before fourth grade, but decided to give his school one more chance.

In hindsight, I wish we hadn't waited. Jack shadowed at Miriam last year and had an amazing day. When he brought up at dinner that he wished he could have gone to a school where they understand him sooner - referring to Miriam - I signed our contract the next day.

We haven't looked back since.

For the first time in a long time, Jack is happy. He is comfortable in his own skin and is willing to try new things. We have seen a private psychologist for several years, and she, too, is blown away by the changes she has seen in Jack's demeanor.

Jack is now able to articulate his emotions and can often tell me what he needs.

Previously, he would just have meltdowns. The whole family felt like we had to walk on eggshells around him. Now, he can manage his emotions.

Jack knows the staff is there to support him, and he truly believes he can do the work. The small classes have been a game changer, because he can no longer fly under the radar. His amazing teachers meet him where he is and show him that he can do things. He can take risks in his learning.

I would never have thought of Jack as a sensory seeking kiddo, but he absolutely loves OT. Starting his day with a sensory diet has shown him what an impact movement has on his ability to learn. He is engaged in his education for the first time ever - and it's beautiful to see.



Also, having all of Jack's therapies, like speech and OT, taken care of at school has given us back family time in the evenings.

The school counselor has also been a huge factor in Jack's progress. From the very beginning, I could tell that her social skills lessons were actually making an impact. She makes abstract concepts concrete.

Rather than watching YouTube videos on cooperation, like he was at his prior school, Jack is participating in lessons that are actually teaching him the skills he needs.

The growth we have seen in Jack has just been beyond our wildest dreams.

This was especially evident when we had a family emergency in March. My husband had a major heart attack, and it was very scary. Jack was flexible when his grandma had to get him to and from school. He was understanding when we had to cancel our spring break plans.

He was willing to do anything we asked him to help our family. He was also willing to talk about his feelings about the whole situation.

Knowing Jack was in school each day with people who cared for him as a person, not just a student, made it possible for me to focus on Brian and his recovery. He felt safe and cared for, and it made all the difference.

Jack even went to a sleep-away camp over the summer! He tried everything at camp, including horseback riding, archery and a zipline, and there is no way he would have gone before his experience at Miriam.

Jack is a valuable member the Miriam community, and he feels it.

MARISSA'S STORY

- Val, Marissa's Mom

"Marissa smiles a lot more, and she has become more independent and expressive."

When she was starting middle school, we wanted an environment for Marissa that would support her in expressing her needs and making friends. Marissa has a receptive and early language disorder, and she has struggled with social challenges and delays caused by early childhood trauma.

I am a teacher and have heard about Miriam since I've been working in St. Louis. I visited years ago, when taking my Montessori training, and had already recommended Miriam to several families I thought could benefit from it.

Three years ago, we decided it was the right place for Marissa. She attended Miriam for sixth, seventh and eighth grades, and she will start at our public high school in fall 2025.

Progressively, we saw Marissa expand her friend circle and start to like school.

She started wanting to go to school, which was different. While at Miriam, she has learned to express her likes and dislikes, and her feelings in general. Marissa smiles a lot more, and she has become more independent and expressive - particularly in the way she dresses.



She has also stopped the major shutdowns that previously created challenges for Marissa and those around her.

She used to put her head down and refuse to do anything. She would not talk or move. These could last up to an hour.

Now, when she is met with an obstacle (academically or with a friend), these incidents only last minutes and can be prevented if her teacher is able to give her a short break before they happen.

The first time Marissa attended a party at Miriam, they had to call me to let me know she was uncomfortable and would probably prefer to be picked up early.

At the last middle school dance, she danced the whole evening with her friends.



She has also shifted her attitude toward learning. Her academic level is still below average, but she loves her classes - particularly math. When we play games, she adds her scores herself using strategies she has learned at Miriam.

The change from Miriam to a public high school will be a big one, but we are less hesitant to make the switch because we feel she has started to find her voice.

Miriam has helped with this transition by attending her IEP meeting and giving the school information about the best way to support Marissa academically, physically and psychologically.

Because of this, we feel the high school is more prepared to welcome her. They have her IEP, we have already created her schedule based on her needs, and we intend to introduce her to staff members before the beginning of the school year to set her up for success.

ANDREW'S STORY

- Erin, Andrew's Mom

"Miriam gave me my son back."

Andrew began eighth grade at a local independent school, after graduating out of a Montessori school. It was during COVID, and he went from a small school where everyone knew, loved and accepted him to a large school where he knew nobody.

Add masking and social distancing to the mix, and it was an absolute disaster. Nobody wanted to be friends with the kid who was a little different, and Andrew didn't know how to initiate new friendships.

On top of the social dilemma, he was suffering academically. None of his teachers were allowed to accommodate his learning disabilities, and his homework load was unreasonable. He was frustrated, sad, desperate and began to lash out in anger, which was not like him.

He also stopped playing piano and drums, stopped doing art, basically stopped being who he authentically was. He put all of his time and mental energy into doing the large loads of homework that he was being assigned.

I could not allow Andrew to continue to be punished for his own suffering. I informed the director that Andrew would not be returning after winter break. So I was on the hunt for a more appropriate school setting for him, and I had very little time to find it.







It was actually the middle school director at his previous school who steered me in the direction of Miriam. He told me that he'd heard from a colleague in education that there was a new high school that served students like Andrew. I immediately called Miriam.

During winter break, Andrew and I toured the high school and fell in love. He got very excited at the possibility of attending Miriam.

As I mentioned, Andrew had pretty much shut down. He had experienced what I refer to as "educational trauma" at his other school. There was the high expectation that a neurodivergent student must meet the exact same standards as a neurotypical student with no learning challenges. It took him a few weeks to settle in at Miriam, and for his fight or flight system to calm down.

But once it did, he began to flourish.

He absolutely loved going to school every day, and came out happy every afternoon at dismissal. And every single day that he's attended Miriam, for the last four and a half years, he's talked my arm off, all the way home!

But not only did he thrive academically, with educators who strove to understand his individual learning needs, he also began to create again. Miriam gave me my son back.

I think my favorite thing about Miriam is how invested each teacher, staff member and administrator is in my son. They know him intimately, they appreciate his unique outlook on the world, and they frequently tell me how much they love hearing the sound of him playing piano echoing down the hallways. Everyone at Miriam loves and appreciates Andrew - not despite his differences, but because of them.



I believe that Andrew's favorite thing about Miriam is that there's never been a single moment when he's had to be anything but himself.

He's been allowed to show his authentic self, which is something that the world outside doesn't always allow and appreciate. He has never felt the need to mask at Miriam. Everyone accepts and loves exactly who he is.

Andrew will attend Webster University, majoring in Sound Production and Engineering, a passion of his.

He got a huge scholarship for his GPA at Miriam, and has already met and collaborated with multiple students and professors in his school and field of study at Webster.

He decided right away that he wanted to live on campus, in the dorms, despite the fact that we only live 20 minutes from Webster. He said that he knows it will be a big challenge to live independently from us, but that he's ready to take that on.

He knows that he's prepared and feels comfortable advocating for himself when he needs help. He has taken the initiative to enroll in the Reeg Academic Resource Center to address his learning differences and request accommodations, as well as the Counseling/Life Development department for weekly emotional and psychological support sessions.

Andrew is such a terrific kid, and it is so gratifying to see him spread his wings! Like most parents of neurodivergent kiddos, I've put my heart and soul into Andrew for 18 years.

Watching him transition beautifully into adulthood is bittersweet - he's exactly in the spot we've been working so hard for, but it also seems like yesterday that he was my tiny baby boy.

ADDI'S STORY

- Gretchen, Addi's Mom

"The small, personalized atmosphere has allowed Addi to thrive, not just survive."

Addi attended public school from preschool to 11th grade. We had really good luck all the way through with caring teachers and counselors who worked tirelessly with us to help Addi be successful in school.

However, for whatever reason, sophomore year was a struggle. We realized that without the consistent support of adults who really understood Addi, the large, loud, and overwhelming high school was taking a toll on her - and we couldn't see just how much of an impact until making the change to move to Miriam.

After a particularly tough week at school, one of our counselors suggested we take a look at Miriam, and there just happened to be an open house that weekend. My husband, Addi and I all attended. We weren't even halfway through the tour when I had tears in my eyes.

It was such an emotional experience for me to see an environment that I knew Addi would thrive in - one where she wouldn't have to use all of her emotional energy just to get through the day. I wished we had found Miriam sooner. We quickly decided that if Addi wanted to move to Miriam, we would make that happen as soon as possible.

Addi started at Miriam High School in January 2024, halfway through her junior year. It was not too late!! It was the best thing we have ever done!



Change is hard, and we were all nervous about going to a new school so late in her career - leaving friends and trusted teachers behind, needing to make new friends, learning how to be in a new environment and form new connections.

What we discovered was that the transition was incredibly smooth.

Addi seemed to fit right in and made friends right away. I didn't have to write letters to each of her new teachers explaining what Addi was all about - they already understood the kind of support she needed, and it wasn't something that made her stand out and feel different from everyone else.

Addi's needs were not uncommon and were just part of the regular support available to all the kids if they needed it.

The small, personalized atmosphere has allowed Addi to thrive, not just survive. We didn't realize the toll her old school was taking on her.

When I used to pick her up after school, she could barely tell me anything about her day. She would just go home, put on her pajamas and get into her bed. She had no energy to do anything else but go to school and battle homework in the evening.

After moving to Miriam, that all changed, like on day one.







Now, she gets into the car, tells me about her day and has the bandwidth to do other things after school. (Don't get me wrong, there are days when she is worn out, but it's because she is working hard, not because she is fighting the atmosphere of the school itself.)

I also notice a big change at drop off in the morning. Now, she bounces out of the car with light energy. In hindsight, she used to get out of the car bracing herself like she was about to get punched in the stomach. It has been such a relief for all of us to be at Miriam.

Addi feels understood and supported and does not feel singled out for the differences in how she sometimes responds to stressful situations at school.

She went from feeling ostracized to feeling accepted and cheered. Her confidence has built and allowed her academic potential to come to the forefront.

Addi's lower stress level at school has benefited our entire family. We are all more relaxed. I am no longer worried when my phone rings during the day. (I never received a call during the day about a problem.) Homework can still be a challenge, but she has so much less. She has time and help built into her day at school so she can get most of it done there. We have been able to be much less hands on, which has helped improve her independence.

Our favorite things about Miriam are the atmosphere at the school and the people who have allowed Addi to thrive!

Our family will be moving to Denver, and Addi plans to study biology at the University of Denver.

JONATHAN'S STORY

- Angela, Jonathan's Mom

"Miriam was a Godsend, our lifeline."

It is hard to believe we are already more than a year past watching our son, Jonathan, graduate from high school.

His 12 years at Miriam were such a transformative journey filled with academic and social growth, friendship, and unwavering support from educators.

When Jonathan was just starting school, we knew he would thrive in a small classroom. After trying two other private schools, it became clear that he would need extra support – and we found Miriam.

After our first visit, it was a no-brainer.

Miriam has been able to build the support he needed into the classroom, with teachers who could teach to him specifically.

I think the individualized approach has been the most impactful for Jonathan.

This has fostered an environment where he could succeed without feeling isolated or different. He faces challenges in language processing, retention and academics, and Miriam quickly became a beacon of hope for our family.





Miriam identified Jonathan's strengths and areas where he could use more support, then built that learning plan just for him. It has given him confidence and space to find his place as a leader.

It is evident that Miriam teachers are here because they are passionate about helping students like Jonathan.

They are knowledgeable about the support and accommodations Jonathan needs, and they are able to push him out of his comfort zone while providing that support.

Not only were his teachers wonderful, but Miriam's therapists are an extension of the classroom. I love that they work with the teachers to support classroom learning.

It was while Jonathan was attending the lower school that Miriam opened its high school. To say we were thrilled is such an understatement – an over-simplified emotion.

The exceptional, individualized education he received at the lower/middle school continued in grades 9-12. The high school also added in life skills courses, experiential learning and transition services.

Miriam was a Godsend, our lifeline.

Jonathan feels successful. As he prepares to embark on the next chapter of his journey, Miriam has equipped him with the confidence and resilience to navigate the challenges that lie ahead.

MICHAEL'S STORY

- Jan, Michael's Grandma

"Our family will be forever grateful for the incredible Miriam team and program!"

Michael started at Miriam as a sophomore in high school – and he finally fell in love with learning.

Michael describes Miriam as "a loving, learning space where students and staff can connect with each other," and I could not agree more.

Every experience I've had with teachers and staff shows how deeply they believe in the Miriam program, and all the students, and how strongly they support the parents!

Michael's learning, attention and executive function challenges were identified earlier in his life, but until Miriam, we had not found a school that could support those needs while providing strong academics for a college-bound student.

In all these years, no other organization, school or mental health institution has provided a "detailed map" to support how he could and would become an adult who will make a difference in his own life and in the lives of others.

That is why Michael is at Miriam High School.







I first learned of Miriam from a colleague who encouraged me to reach out for a tour. After touring and meeting with Mrs. Pruitt and Mrs. Thurman, plus meeting several teachers, our first impression was so positive.

Feedback from colleagues in the special education community confirmed all of our impressions of Miriam High School!

We recently met with Michael's academic, counseling and transition team to review the ILP that was developed for Michael.

I was completely amazed at all of the work that this team put into preparing such a comprehensive plan for Michael's current and future college academic needs, and the preparation for providing him with life skills that will enable and support his efforts to be a productive adult.

Michael's teachers inspire and motivate him to strive to be the best student he is capable of being and to reach his level of capability.

Miriam also offers an amazing transition program and community outreach opportunities.

Our family will be forever grateful for the incredible Miriam team and program!

SARAH'S STORY

- Debbie, Sarah's Mom

"Miriam has not been just a game changer, as they say, but a life changer for Sarah."

I've always known Sarah learned differently, and I've always been open with Sarah about her differences. As early as kindergarten, she began to struggle with letter identification, sight words and rhyming. Private diagnostic testing revealed two types of severe dyslexia.

Sarah's elementary school made accommodations for her, and she did quite well. Unfortunately, those accommodations ended when she transitioned to middle school, and she lost all of the ground she had gained.

Suddenly, Sarah was engulfed in a debilitating depression. Doctors even wondered if she had a brain tumor, because of the physical symptoms she was having, but it turned out to be situational depression.

I was losing my spunky, determined daughter, and I knew I needed to find her a different school environment.

After a Miriam open house, all I could say was it was too good to be true. But it was for real! Sarah started at Miriam in seventh grade.

Miriam made every accommodation possible, evening the playing field, so Sarah was able to reach her full potential. That is what equal opportunity is all about.



It isn't about making it "easy." Learning will never be easy for Sarah, but Miriam made it attainable by taking into consideration how she learns and adapting their teaching approach.

Sarah not only began to understand the material and progress academically, but she also gained back her self-confidence. She found a welcoming atmosphere at Miriam, where she felt comfortable asking questions and being herself.

It's ok to be different at Miriam, because they empower and embrace everyone. They have provided Sarah with social skills to navigate through many difficult situations, and I have witnessed her using these outside of the school environment.

One of Sarah's favorite things about Miriam is the close bond she has formed with other students. She made many friends at Miriam - something that she did not have before.

The teachers and administrators truly are dedicated to teaching unique learners.

It takes patience and creativity to provide instruction in a variety of ways, and still reach all the academic standards required of them. And they are always approachable, friendly, caring and energetic!

Miriam has not been just a game changer, as they say, but a life changer for Sarah. Education is about so much more than book learning. Miriam is preparing students to succeed in life.

Sarah graduated in 2024 and is attending Hannibal-LaGrange University. Thanks to Miriam, she is not only on the right path, but she has goals and aspirations, and is ready to reach them!





DEMETRIUS' STORY

- Donielle, Demetrius' Mom

"The education he received from Miriam High School exceeded our expectations."

As Demetrius was finishing middle school, we knew we needed to choose just the right high school environment for him - one that would accommodate his challenges AND give him the academic foundation he would need for the future.

Now, four years later as Demetrius prepares to start college, we know we made the right choice by sending him to Miriam High School.

We were looking for an academic setting that would meet all his needs. We wanted a supportive environment that would allow him to succeed both academically and socially - an environment where his strengths were celebrated and encouraged. Miriam met all these criteria and equipped him with the tools to be successful in school.

We watched Demetrius thrive during his four years at Miriam High School, benefiting from the staff's continuous support. Even in the challenging moments, they simply helped him work through those struggles.

During those days, he was not punished, judged or looked down upon. Instead, he was respected and supported, and provided with resources to assist him when an obstacle occurred.

Our favorite thing about Miriam was seeing Demetrius treated as an individual, and not a diagnosis. Education is very important to our whole family, and we want Demetrius to reach his goals.







Every school day was tailored to what he needed to make him successful in and outside the classroom. Any question, suggestion or needed reassurance was always addressed by the staff, regardless of how big or small it was.

Demetrius also enjoyed that individual attention and accommodation, as well as the small class sizes. One of his favorite things about Miriam was that the after-school clubs are catered toward students' interests. He particularly felt at home with the Running Club, which gave him the opportunity to run 5K races throughout the St. Louis area.

He also connected well with his peers and made great social progress. "I like being surrounded by other neurodivergent peers that can relate to me and encourage me," Demetrius said. "Overall, my experience at Miriam made me more insightful and positive about my future."

Demetrius plans to attend Saint Louis University full-time this fall.

He will live on campus and major in computer science. My son is excited about life on campus, meeting other college students with similar interests, and expanding his knowledge of computers and technology.

During his senior year of high school, Demetrius dual enrolled at Miriam and St. Louis Community College, taking English 101 in the fall and English 102 in the spring. We are thrilled with the experience and grateful that Miriam offered the dual enrollment option.

The education Demetrius received from Miriam High School exceeded our expectations. We are confident that he is adequately prepared to attend college.

JUDE'S STORY

- Megan, Jude's Mom

"We found this support at Miriam."

Jude started attending Miriam Middle School in sixth grade, and he just graduated from Miriam High School in May 2025. I know Jude was a happy presence at Miriam, and they tell me he will be missed.

He wasn't always as outgoing as he was at Miriam. Facing learning challenges throughout his life, Jude mostly flew under the radar during elementary school in a public district. He knew if he behaved and stayed quiet, not much would be expected of him. His elementary teachers were aware of this and did not allow him to hide.

We knew he would need a similar environment for middle and high school, and the large public school with frequent class changes would likely not have worked well for Jude. His success in the past was largely based on his development of relationships with his teachers.

He switched to Miriam for middle school, so he could continue to develop relationships with teachers in a smaller environment. We needed to find teachers who would take the time to get to know him and push him out of his comfort zone. We also needed teachers who would realize this quickly, so we wouldn't lose time while they got to know him.

We found this support at Miriam. There was still an adjustment period, but once he got comfortable, Jude came out of his shell - which allowed for ample opportunity to work on his social skills.



Language and "reading the room" have always been among Jude's major challenges. The varying levels of social skills among fellow students have been helpful for Jude in sharpening those skills.

Our favorite thing about Miriam is how the faculty and staff really give space for students to express their unique interests and try to help them find ways to really shine in those areas.

Jude's favorite was the bowling club! He loves to be active in general, and bowling is his favorite. He has also been a member of Miriam's cross country team, participating in 5K races throughout the St. Louis area. There are so many after-school clubs and activities that encourage growth and social connection.

We're also grateful for Miriam's transition services at the high school. It's a different brand of anxiety as a parent of a neurodivergent young adult than for our neurotypical children.



Miriam really helps shine a light on this less traveled road. And while this road is still under construction as new programs and services emerge, Miriam is always moving forward to make sure students can take advantage of them.

Jude plans to attend the University of Missouri - St. Louis' Succeed Program this fall.

As part of Succeed, he will move into the inclusive dorms and begin working toward an educational certificate. As for potential career paths, Jude is interested in hospitality, particularly with the elderly community, or the sports management field.

I can say with 100-percent confidence that Jude is the No. 1 St. Louis Blues fan, so if he could find his way into any type of sports environment, he would thrive.

He really just loves to cheer for anyone and everyone who is pursuing their passion.



CHRIS HOLMES: A TEACHER'S STORY

"Those four years at Miriam were by far the most magical (of my career)."

My journey with Miriam began with our oldest son, now 31, whose struggles with ADHD and ASD took him to seven different schools over 13 years.

A 2e student with significant deficits in social interaction and emotional regulation, none of these schools was the right fit. Not even close.

When he was in seventh grade, we heard of Miriam School and immediately called to visit. It seemed perfect, but there was no room in the incoming eighth-grade class, so we did the best we could with the limited options available to us.

Fast forward 20 years: Miriam announces plans to open a high school. Since we couldn't find the right school for Charlie, maybe I could help create the right school for other kids like him.

In 2006, I left public education and joined the staff at what was then called Miriam Academy. I have loved every year and every school of my teaching career, but those four years at Miriam were by far the most magical.

Being surrounded by experienced, exceptional teachers – people whose professionalism was matched only by their compassion – elevated my own practice. It felt as if this school really mattered, as if it truly made a difference in the lives of its students and families. In fact, it felt like family.





In my return to public education, I have taken the lessons learned from my time at Miriam and shared them with students, colleagues, and families on a daily basis.

Many people find it odd that I now work in a gifted education role, considering that Miriam serves students who learn differently.

"What a radical change," they say. I disagree. What they don't understand is that both groups of students learn differently, both have unmet needs, both struggle at times, and both possess significant strengths and talents.

The key is a positive, proactive approach that begins with playing to students' strengths. Then, and only then, can we make meaningful progress in closing learning gaps.

This is what the Miriam schools do so well. This is why I will always love this place and its people.

AARON FRANCIS: AN ALUMNI STORY

"I recall my time at Miriam as being the place where my foundation was laid."

My parents and I had a challenging time finding an educational environment that fostered development and was flexible to accept students with learning differences. We needed a tailored environment which could accept students as they came and encourage them to be independent.



One day, I walked into The Miriam School and little did I know, my parents had finally found me a place for me to grow my roots. Like the Chinese bamboo tree, the first several years of growth are under the surface – the roots grow deep and strong before finally the tree sprouts and grows tall. There are no shortcuts, no steroids, nor stimulants to bear a strong and healthy tree – just patience, service, and confidence. The Miriam School embodied these qualities and passed them on to me, ensuring I had a durable foundation to support and grow through the life that lay ahead of me.

I feel I can never overstate the impact which The Miriam School - staff, faculty, classmates alike - had on me. I recount every class of the day as being an opportunity for me to learn something knew and improve my skills.

At Miriam I learned to excel at reading, math, and computer lab; I learned to express myself through art, sports, and music; I learned how thin I could wear some teachers' patience – even after I crossed that line, they still welcomed me for who I was and did not shame me for it.

That type of warm-welcome and forgiving environment taught me that anyone is capable of growth, and the responsibility is mine to be the best I can be in all areas of my life.

I struggled primarily with ADD & ADHD at the time, and of course, still do today. Through quick prognosis and adaptation, The Miriam School program taught me one of ADHD's most valuable tools – regulation. Each day was blanketed with opportunities for expression, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development.

In hindsight, the themes which I internalized at Miriam supported me through high school and college and still today.

When I feel overwhelmed, I look for opportunities to regulate; when I want to express myself, I make music; when I need to step away from sensory overload or being over-stimulated, I seek out





that quiet time to refocus. These are skills that I have refined over time through my life experiences, but like a bamboo tree, the seeds were sown several years ago at Miriam School.

Through their steadfast patience, adaptability and warm welcome, I have grown strong and have confidence to face the tumultuous and ever-changing social-climate the world brings.

As a Bachelor of Science graduate, full-time senior engineer, and world-traveler, I recall my time at Miriam as being the place where my foundation was laid and core values refined, such that I habitually seek out opportunities to grow personally and be of service to the community around me.

Miriam School showed me that in the face of the most challenging learning differences and wavering self-confidence, there is still a path to independence and limitless opportunities for education and fulfillment.

ALEX BOWER-LEET: AN ALUMNI STORY

"Coming to Miriam made me feel like I wasn't alone."

When I look back at my journey as a proud alum of The Miriam School, I tend to think of it as a positive and transformative time for my family and I.

Growing up with a learning disability was often difficult. I will admit, however, coming to Miriam made me feel like I wasn't alone.

My family and I were reassured by the kind, passionate, and patient staff there that I could achieve anything I set my mind to with hard work, perseverance, and commitment. Everybody at Miriam was supportive from the very beginning of my journey to even now.

I learned so much there that I still carry with me to this day.

From communicating with others effectively to even making sure that I can be good influence on others such as my co-workers, friends, and family.

I always pride myself on leading by example for others, and that's something that Miriam instilled in me.

It was an honor being part of the first of now many eight grade graduating classes way back in the spring of 2003. It was also an honor speaking at Miriam's eighth-grade graduation in 2021 to inspire proud alums to aim high and set goals.





I am currently serving a role as a teacher's assistant at Parkway School District. This is my third year at the school I am at, and I love what I do there.

I am also starting a new journey, thanks to Miriam for giving me good guidance for independence. I'll be attending the University of Kentucky master's in library science program, where I'll be able to achieve my real goal of becoming a public librarian.

Thank you, Miriam, for inspiring me and others to achieve what we can do when we set our minds to it.

This place is truly special, and I am thankful for being part of this wonderful school of unique learners and a dedicated staff.



"It's such a relief to know that Jonas is accepted for exactly who he is."

"No one is judging him."

"The small, personalized atmosphere has allowed Addi to thrive, not just survive."

"Miriam has been like a warm hug that has allowed Barrett to flourish."

"He is comfortable in his own skin and is willing to try new things."

"Miriam was a Godsend, our lifeline."

"Miriam gave me my son back."

"We are so thankful Miriam is in St. Louis!"

"Her confidence is back, and so is her sparkling personality."

miriam
SCHOOL and LEARNING CENTER

Together, we empower students with learning differences through our specialized educational approach by unlocking their potential and paving the way for lifelong success.

miriamstl.org