

PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

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Academics and Acceptance Flourish at Mill Neck Integrated Preschool

One boy is a little taller than the other and is blond, his friend is dark haired. One lives in Nassau County, the other farther out, in Suffolk. These differences hardly matter to the two six-year-olds, and the fact that Brady is hearing impaired and Dylan is not, makes the least difference of all. For Dylan and Brady, it's all about the fun they have when they get together. Fun that started when they were in the same integrated preschool class at Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf.

Jenna Loreda, Dylan's mom, elaborates on the friendship that blossomed between her son and Brady. "The boys were in the same class last year. They were always together in school and Brady helped Dylan a lot, in particular with carrying his backpack. They both got picked up from school so they would walk to the pick-up area together, always asking to have play dates. Finally after a few weeks, Brady's dad and I set one up."

The boys never had a problem communicating with each other and this ease of communication between them grew along with their acceptance of one another. "Despite the differences in their hearing abilities, Brady and Dylan hit it off from the beginning," says Nicole Petrella, the boys' teacher at Mill Neck. "They always wanted to sit next to each other and work together."

Brady's dad, Keith Reyling, says, "I remember Nicole and Jenna saying how shy Dylan was at the beginning of school. It took him a little while to come out of his shell and I like to think that Brady's friendship helped, but I think the friendship actually sparked over having the same snack!"

Typically, most graduates of Mill Neck's Integrated Pre-K program transition to kindergarten or first grade in their home school districts. As Brady and Dylan continue to flourish academically in their district schools, their bond also continues to strengthen. The boys' parents get their sons together usually during each school break, and just recently, Dylan celebrated his sixth birthday with his friend Brady among the guests at the party. For play dates, the Loredos and Reylings alternate hosting or meet at a location somewhere in between,

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like BounceU or mini golf. The boys also like Nintendo Wii, Legos, and playing outside. As Loreda puts it, “Just typical boy stuff.”

Keith Reyling agrees. “Brady and Dylan seem up for anything when meeting for a play date. As long as they get to hang out together, it doesn’t matter what the activity is. I think the friendship between them has endured because it is one of those true friendships good for both kids. As for what it meant to Brady, and to my wife and me, that he made a friend so early in school – well I can’t understate how wonderful it made us feel. Brady would come home every day with stories about Dylan and it warmed our hearts knowing he had someone who made him feel comfortable in school.”

The Integrated Pre-K – K Auditory/Verbal Program at Mill Neck, where Dylan and Brady first met, is a full day program for 3 and 4 year-old children who are hearing and hearing impaired. The hearing impaired children who attend the program are hearing aid and/or cochlear implant users, like Brady. In Mill Neck’s program, the acquisition of language and vocabulary happens primarily through the children listening to and speaking with each other, rather than by direct teacher instruction alone.

As Kathleen Kerzner, Principal of Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf, explains, “More natural learning occurs as hearing impaired children listen to and speak with their hearing peers and these children go on to kindergarten or first grade with the same skills that the hearing children have.” Kerzner also notes that both hearing and hearing impaired children benefit from the program. “School districts have shared that our children are so well-prepared,” she says.

Dylan’s mom agrees. “Dylan is doing very well in school and has transitioned nicely. Mill Neck really prepared him for kindergarten and he is reading and writing now. His whole family is extremely proud of the work he is doing.”

As for his son, Reyling says, “Brady is having an amazing year in first grade. We attribute so much of his success to the experience he had at Mill Neck.” He credits Brady’s consistent exposure to books last year with fostering the child’s love for reading and current above-grade reading ability. Of Brady’s hearing and speech, he says, “Brady continues to work hard at learning to hear and his hearing and speech have continually progressed to where he is understood and able to communicate with his peers.” Brady had surgery in June to become bilaterally implanted, and while his dad acknowledged it was tough getting ready for a new school and learning to hear through his new processor, Brady has shown amazing resilience in meeting these challenges.

Reyling concludes, “I can’t say enough good things about Jenna. I’m so thankful for her being the kind of person who not only was willing to let her son develop a friendship with a hearing impaired child, but also encouraged it. When she told me that she wanted the boys to be friends for life, I knew Brady was lucky to have met Dylan at Mill Neck.”

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As Dylan and Brady's story illustrates, Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf brings together children who are hearing and hearing impaired, successfully developing meaningful communication, lasting friendships and youngsters who learn at an early age, what it means to be compassionate towards others.

The Integrated Preschool is one of the programs offered by Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf, a 4201 school. Others include the Infant/Toddler Program, Total Communication Program for pre-k through grade 12, certified high school and a Deaf-Autism Special Needs program.

Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf is a state-supported private school, located in northern Nassau County, New York. It is open to youngsters, from infancy to age 21, who are legal residents of New York State, including Long Island and the New York metropolitan area. There is no cost to families or school districts for a Deaf child to attend. Referrals are initiated by parents, clinics, physicians or school districts. Children benefit from specialized communication techniques, up-to-date curriculum and technology resources. For more information on Mill Neck's programs and services, please contact Kathleen Kerzner at 516-628-4232 or kkerzner@millneck.org.

Photo Caption:

Best buds: Dylan and Brady love hanging out together.

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