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Students at Chileda learn, thrive and grow

By Brittany Lake
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LA CROSSE, Wis. (WXOW) – April is Autism Awareness Month. More than 3.5 million Americans live with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, according to The Autism Society.

For more than 40 years Chileda has been helping young people in La Crosse have a safe learning environment.

They serve students between the ages of 6 and 21. Autism spectrum disorder, traumatic brain injury, and oppositional defiant disorder are common diagnoses for children who attend Chileda. With a little help the students are able to make and set goals and attain them.

At Chileda the school day is shaped a little differently. It's a living and learning center for kids like Jason.

Jason's been a treat a breath of fresh air to Chileda, very intelligent, very smart," said Todd Seefeldt, Jason's teacher.

This football fan can recite every year the Patriots won the Super Bowl. With a photographic memory he can recall numbers and statistics easily, but other things, like communicating in social situations, can be more difficult.

"What may be something simple to you and me but to them holy cow its quite the challenge," added Seefeldt.

That's where the teachers of Chileda come in, "a lot of times they're just like you and me their brain just works a little bit differently. They need you to help them do things, help them understand and be patient with them."

Christopher Ries has been practicing patience for the last 6 years, he works with Anakin on his social skills.

"He cares a lot about the people around him and the people that are in his life and he used to have a hard time dealing with those emotions," said Ries.

"I've learned how to get along with other people," explained Anakin. And just like every other student, both Anakin and Jason have made it their goal to graduate

"Our goal is to get them into a position to be as independent as they can be," added Ries.

With the right people around them and a place to help them create better lives for themselves they can reach their full potential.

Chileda is expanding, they recently purchased a building on Mormon Coulee Road to become their development and learning center.

Tags Jason Chileda Medicine Sport Education Student Christopher Ries Autism Spectrum Disorder
Anakin Todd Seefeldt