

# 66 Matrix Mighty Milers... MAKING AN IMPACT

Before Parker was ever born, I dreamed of the t-ball games, the weekends busy with soccer, and even felt fearless at the intense, precise juggling act most parents perform in order to fit it all in between extracurriculars, sports, school, and friends. "Bring it on," I would have said, as I dreamed with anticipation and joy about watching my son grow, establish a talent, embrace friendly competition, learn to win and to lose in a way only sports can teach, and most importantly - forge those lifelong friendships of your teammates.

But like most, I never dreamed I would have a child on the autism spectrum and how global the impact is on a person and their family. Like many parents of kiddos on the spectrum experience, our family went through a "grieving process," in which we mourned what we expected, and then were tasked with embarking on an uncertain journey to accept and find the beautiful child we do have. Until - and only until - we found Matrix Parent Network and Mighty Milers this year, was Parker truly able to participate in a sport - we had given up even trying.

But through Mighty Milers, our grief has reprieve. We have learned the difference between "fitting in" and "belonging." Fitting in is adapting yourself so that you are accepted, and belonging is being accepted no matter what. This experience has transcended our journey to an even higher level of acceptance where we feel joy and celebration, no matter how hard it can be. Every week, we look with excitement to the fun, positive, organized practices.

Our whole family is surrounded with positivity, energy, motivation, and drive. There are loud cheers no matter what. *To quote Parker after his first practice, "wow, I really needed that!"*

Thank you Matrix, and all who support them, you gave us the bountiful gift of belonging through a much desired rite of passage, which is the gift of childhood sport.

-Parker's Mom

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