WOW Factor

EST. 2011 15 ANNIVERSARY

THE WORDS WE WAITED FOR

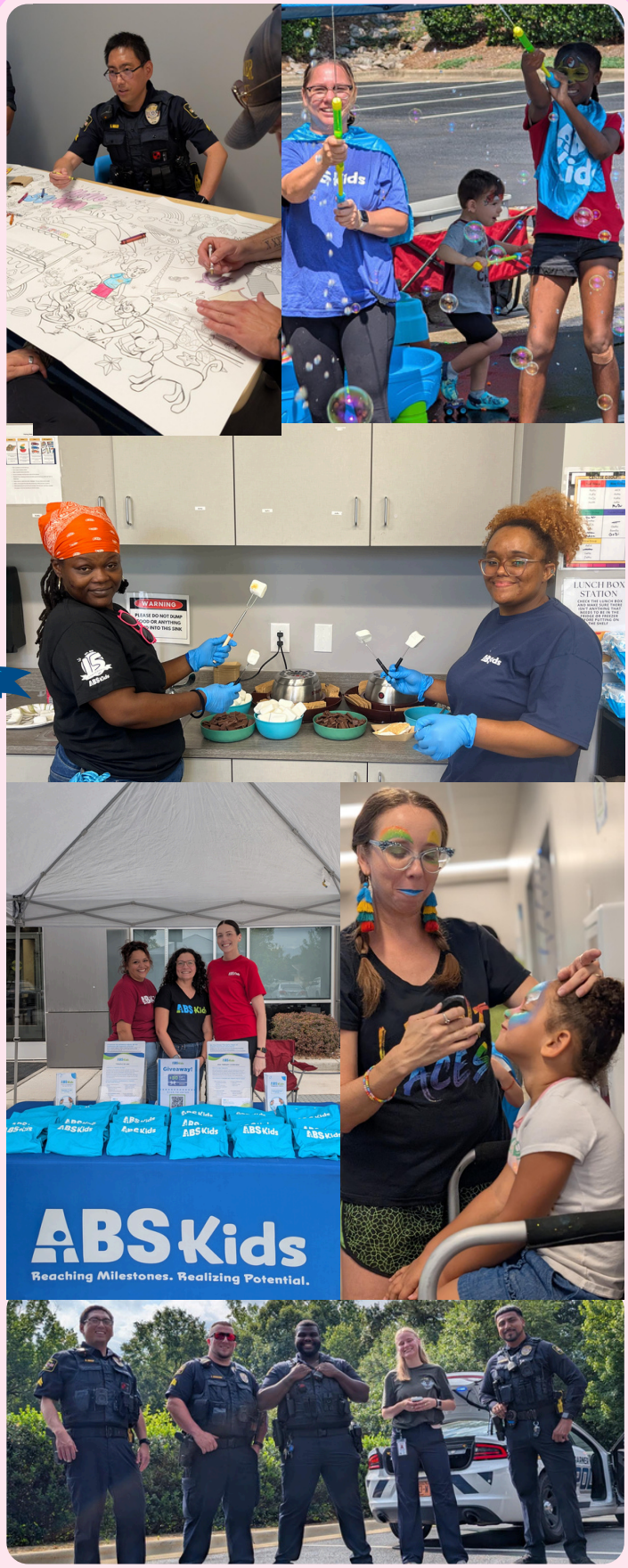
Fifteen years of WOW, one word at a time.

July celebrated the people behind ABS Kids. August is about what those people make possible.

When we collected WOW moments during our anniversary celebration, one theme rose above every other: first words. A name said out loud for the first time. A request instead of a tantrum. A child asking his mom about her day. Hundreds of you told us about the moment a voice broke through, and this month, we are putting those moments on the front page.

Every word was earned by a child, a family, and a team that refused to stop showing up.

> **When my nonverbal client talked, I jumped up with tears.**
>
> **Andrea B., RBT, Chino, CA**



Sensory Summer Send-off | 15th Anniversary Edition
Garner, NC

The first word is never just a word. It is a door opening.

September Upcoming Events

September 4, 2026
Festival LatinoAmericano
Provo, UT

September 12, 2026
Flutie 5K
Salt Lake City, UT

September 14, 2026
Autism Tee Off
Ogden, UT

September 18, 2026
Together We Dream
Kannapolis, NC

September 22, 2026
ConnectStrong
Charlotte, NC

September 22, 2026
Sensory-Friendly Tuesday Evening
St. George, UT

September 22, 2026
Triad Run/Walk for Autism
Greensboro, NC

September 26, 2026
Run for Kids Sake
Greenville, SC

September 26, 2026
Community Inclusion Celebration
Chino, CA

September 26, 2026
Health and Wellness Fair
Rancho Cucamonga, CA

Check out the **Community Events** page on our website for upcoming events!

Latest blog & Resources

Qualities of an ABS Kids Registered Behavior Technician

Fifteen Years of WOW Moments

A Mother's Journey: Helping Ben Thrive Beyond Autism

Autism Weekly PODCAST

Dr. Brian Boyd: Who Autism Research Leaves Out, and How We Fix It

Hear from the UNC researcher behind the Black Empowerment and Autism Network on bias, access, and building care systems that actually fit families.

Autism research has historically been built on a narrow slice of the population. Dr. Brian Boyd argues that gap is not just an academic problem. It shows up as later diagnoses, thinner services, and worse outcomes for the families who were never in the data.

In this episode, Dr. Boyd joins host Jeff Skibitsky to talk about founding the Black Empowerment and Autism Network (BEAM), now close to 70 members across research, medicine, and clinical practice, and what it takes to build systems of care that respond to the families in front of them.

READY FOR SCHOOL

The greatest WOW moment of all: graduating from our care into the classroom.

Every therapy goal points toward the same door: the one that leads out of our centers and into a classroom, a community, a childhood. This fall, as backpacks get zipped and buses roll, we're celebrating the children who worked their way to the biggest milestone we know. Here are their stories, told by the team members who walked beside them.

The First Client

Emily C., RBT in Tennessee, just watched her first-ever client graduate from ABA services, and he starts preschool this fall. She worked with him through his entire time at ABS Kids. "He has grown so much, I am so proud of him!"

From Silence to Sentences to School

When McKenzie's client came to the center, he was nonverbal. Two years of steady work with his PECS board built a bridge, first to pictures, then to spoken words, at the center and at home. That same client has now graduated and is in school.

Walking the Stage

Shamaya F., RBT III in Tennessee, watched her client do something his team once only hoped for: he stayed seated with his classmates through his entire kindergarten graduation, then walked across the stage. Focus, patience, and participation, all earned through consistent work across settings.

Through a mother's ears.

Vania's first client communicated only through noises when they met two years ago. Within months, her mom was thanking the team because her daughter could play with other kids. Today she communicates, she's confident, and she's ready for school.

"My WOW moment is seeing the number of children that are able to graduate from treatment and back into their community."

Cathy B., Director of Clinical Operations, Tennessee

WOW SPOTTED

AROUND THE CENTER, COMMUNITY EDITION

Sirens, Smiles, and Superheroes at Camino Del Rio

Another successful visit at Camino Del Rio! San Diego first responders rolled up with a Falck ambulance, and our kiddos were absolute pros, climbing in and out and meeting the crew.

Operations Manager **Maria D.,** shared a big thank you to San Diego's first responders for creating such a fun and memorable experience for our little learners.

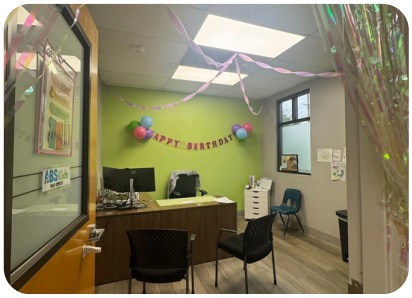
Community partnerships like this one make generalization real: new people, new sounds, new confidence.

Springtree Shows Up (Twice)

The team at our Springtree center in South Carolina had quite a month. When a teammate celebrated a birthday, the crew transformed the office with decorations, gifts, and kind gestures, the kind of everyday thoughtfulness she summed up as working alongside "a caring, supportive, and fun team."

Then the team shirts arrived, printed with the motto that captures how Springtree operates: Always busy, but down to help.

That spirit isn't just for each other. It's the same energy that greets every family who walks through the door.



Every moment we share on Engage shines a light on the mission in action.

Hearing From Our Psychologist: Garett Hawkinson

Helping families understand what is driving a child's needs, and what comes next.

Based in Charlotte, North Carolina, Garett works out of the ABS Kids training facility on Randolph Road, alongside Klindt and the Charlotte-area ABA training team.

In a practice that reaches families through telehealth, Garett has spent years working closely with teammates across the country he has never met in person. As he puts it: "I chat with you all the time, but we've probably never been within even 200 miles of each other." The distance never gets in the way of the connection.

Focusing on Functional Needs

Families sometimes come into feedback sessions with questions or concerns about what ABA treatment might look like. Garett emphasizes that treatment should not be about eliminating harmless behaviors or requiring compliance simply for the sake of appearing more typical. Goals should be tied to meaningful functional needs.

Take hand-flapping. "Just because it's occurring doesn't mean it's a target for service." A child flapping their hands while excitedly watching Bluey is not a concern simply because the behavior looks different. The focus should instead be on areas that meaningfully interfere with daily functioning, such as significant dysregulation, communication difficulties, safety concerns, or barriers to independence.

Eight Years Without Answers

One family came in with a son who was about 12 after years of evaluations without a clear answer. His history raised concern for a possible PANS/PANDAS presentation, which warranted further medical evaluation before assuming his symptoms were best explained by autism.

Rather than treating the autism referral as a foregone conclusion, Garett recommended addressing that differential first and then reassessing the developmental picture if concerns remained. Cases like this are uncommon, but they highlight an important part of psychological assessment: sometimes getting the right answer means being willing to consider what else could be driving the symptoms.

"A referral is a question, not a conclusion. Sometimes you have to rule out another explanation before you can confidently define what you are seeing."

Skills, Not Conformity

Treatment should not be about prescribing a personality or teaching a child to appear more typical. Garett emphasizes that the goal is to build skills that help a child communicate, form relationships on their own terms, advocate for themselves, and navigate everyday demands with greater independence.

"I'm not going to tell you who you have to be. A child may want a small social circle or a large one; the point is not to decide that for them. The goal is to give them access to skills they can use to participate, communicate, or pursue what matters to them."

ADVICE TO PARENTS

Parents have a unique view of their child's day-to-day functioning, and Garett encourages them to bring concerns forward, ask questions, and expect clear explanations from the professionals involved in their child's care. A parent should never be made to feel unreasonable for wanting to understand why a diagnosis or recommendation was made or why it wasn't.

When others say a child will simply "grow out of it," persistent developmental concerns are still worth asking about. An evaluation does not guarantee a diagnosis; it provides more information. Sometimes the answer is reassurance. Other times, it identifies an area where earlier support may be helpful.

"Take your concerns seriously. You know your child's day-to-day behavior better than anyone, and you have every right to ask questions and seek an evaluation when something doesn't seem right."

Hearing From Our BCBA: Duncan McRoberts

Bringing a teammate's heart to every family's journey, one first at a time.

Duncan grew up in Kaysville, Utah and moved to Logan for school nine years ago. He never left. He and his wife are raising a 5-year-old and a 2-year-old there, restoring a home built in 1911, and spending their free time camping, boating and fishing.

How did you find your way in ABA?

"I started out pre-med and pre-dental with a chemistry major and a psychology minor, then ended up flipping the two. I was working in a treatment facility for adults with autism, schizophrenia and OCD, and I met a lot of people in their 20s who had never gotten the right diagnosis or the right treatment. By that point, there is only so much you can do. That pushed me toward early intervention. ABA also meshed with my background in the physical sciences. It is deterministic and science-based in a way psychology is not. I was in the rat labs at Utah State watching behavior change in real time and thought, this is awesome."

That interest was personal, too. Duncan grew up with an uncle who has Down syndrome and is nonverbal. He earned his undergraduate degree at Utah State and his graduate degree at Purdue, and came to ABS Kids as an LRBT for the tuition assistance and the training program.

What is a WOW moment that stayed with you?

"When I was a BT, I started with a kiddo who was nonverbal. Within a year he was speaking in full sentences and had moved into a general education classroom without an IEP. Watching his parents go from hopelessness to seeing their son make friends and tell them what he needs, that is the part that sticks with me. And it is not me doing that. It is the science."

Special Moments

"Potty training. It is a huge milestone for the kid, the RBT, the BCBA and the parents. A kiddo may still be nonverbal, but if he can use the bathroom independently, that opens the door to less restrictive environments everywhere he goes."

How would you describe your teaching style?

"Naturalistic, client-led and focused on assent. No kiddo is forced into anything. We build motivation through play and by pairing ourselves as reinforcers, so they want to complete these actions because they are excited for the praise, the tokens, or just because we have become fun to be around. I also do a lot of behavior skills training. I model with the kiddo so RBTs and families can see how it is supposed to look, then they run it and I give feedback."

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WHAT'S YOUR WOW

CHECK OUT OUR WOW MOMENTS FROM AUGUST!

April S.

As an Operations Manager at Wellness Way, April's WOW moment isn't a single breakthrough. It's one she gets to witness again and again: the excitement on a parent's face when their child reaches a milestone they once thought was out of reach.

Improved communication. A new skill. A step toward independence. In April's words, those moments are the reminder "that every role at ABS Kids contributes to life-changing outcomes for our families."

That's a WOW moment with the whole company inside it. From the front desk to the field, everyone has a hand in the milestone. Congratulations, April!

Mariana R.

Sometimes a WOW moment is one word, said clearly, at exactly the right time.

Mariana's nonverbal client looked at her in the lunch room, pointed to a messy table, and said "dirty" in clear words.

One word, spoken out loud, connecting exactly what he saw to exactly what he meant. That's a voice breaking through, and it fits this month's theme perfectly.

Eva W.

For months, pointing meant borrowing. Eva's client needed her finger, or a chewy, to bridge the gap between wanting something and showing it.

Then came the day he pointed all on his own. No assistance, no prompt. Just his own hand, showing his own choice.

What made it a WOW moment wasn't just the milestone. It was, in Eva's words, "how much it meant to the client's family." The smallest gesture, carrying the biggest weight.

WOW FACTOR