

I HAVE A DREAM

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

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Case Story: Jayshawn and the Inspiration of Dr. King

Jayshawn* smiles as he sees Joanna at the door. She's picking him up from his third-grade classroom at Sumner Math and Science Community Academy in North Lawndale. It's just before 2:00 PM, his usual therapy session time. Amidst a day of challenging math, reading and navigating challenging social relationships, Jayshawn looks forward to a time when he can relax and just be himself. Therapy's a familiar oasis in an otherwise exhausting week.

Jayshawn jumps out of his seat and begins to walk toward Joanna. She waves at his teacher, Ms. Bracey, acknowledging the weekly ritual. Joanna sees portraits of Martin Luther King Jr. the class had painted in art all around the classroom walls and remembers when she first met Jayshawn.

Ms. Bracey had referred him for standoffishness and "a general, quiet sadness." She didn't know why Jayshawn was so withdrawn but thought he might need some individual support. She shared her concerns and asked Joanna to contact Jayshawn's mom, Ms. Henson. They soon met to discuss how he might benefit from counseling.

"Friendships are hard for him," Ms. Henson said. She knotted her hands in her lap and looked down. "Since his dad walked out on us a few months ago he's been reluctant to open up to anyone. He sits quietly in class and barely interacts; he just stares out into space."

"That must have been difficult to share," replied Joanna. "I can't imagine what you and he must be

going through." Ms. Henson straightens up and sighs deeply, "I haven't shared this with anyone, but something about you makes me feel comfortable."

They talked for over an hour about her relationship with Jayshawn, his strengths and challenges, his interests, and early childhood years. Then they discussed how Ms. Henson felt Joanna could provide support in their time of grieving and loss. Ms. Henson hoped Jayshawn might begin to share what was going on inside him.

As Jayshawn reaches Joanna in the doorway, they smile and head towards their therapy room.

"This is a special month" Jayshawn spontaneously proclaims. He opens up immediately inside the room. "We're celebrating African Americans!"

Joanna responds, reflecting Jayshawn's happiness. "It is a special month. It sounds like it means a lot to you."

"It does! It's a time where I feel accepted, where my family and I can celebrate our heritage." His face lights up as he continues. "You know, my mom and me."

"Black history month is a time where you feel accepted," responds Joanna, reinforcing Jayshawn's enthusiasm.

"Yes, where I feel celebrated."

"This is a time where you feel like there's reason to celebrate, where you feel special."

Jayshawn discusses his feelings about February, “his favorite month.” It’s a reason to celebrate when it seems like there isn’t much to be thankful for.

After a moment, he says, “I miss my dad.”

“You’ve been thinking about him a lot.”

“Yeah, it’s just, I’ve been thinking, where did he even go?”

“Yeah, it’s like, you’re here, and here is important.”

“Yeah, our house, our dog Grover, mom, me, my painting!”

“There is so much here important to you. You, your mom, your painting.”

“I wish I could show it to him; it’s of Dr. King, I made it in art on Monday.”

“You painted Dr. King on Monday, it is a very important painting, and you’d like to be able to show it to your dad.”

Joanna continues to draw Jayshawn out, and his face lights up.

“Yes, it is, it means so much to me. Some people used to think that if you weren’t white, you weren’t as good of a person as if you were. Dr. King let everyone know that that isn’t true. He shared that you’re a very good person no matter what color your skin is.”

“Dr. King shared with everyone that no matter what color your skin is, you’re a very good person.”

“Yeah! He did. He said that he had a dream that everyone would think like he did.”

“Dr. King hoped everyone could see, like him, that everyone has equal value, no matter what they look like.”

“Yeah! I really like him. I think my dad would like him too.”

“You want to share Dr. King’s words with your dad. That would mean a lot to you.”

Jayshawn nodded and went to grab Sorry. “Let’s play now!”

“Sure, Jayshawn, let’s play Sorry. We’re in this together.”

After the session, Joanna reflected on how Black History Month challenges all of us to remember where we’ve come from, where we are, and where we’re headed. February is a time to celebrate diversity, the joy of coming together, and the message of inclusion of all people, regardless of their origins or backgrounds.

She thought about how Jayshawn’s life has been touched for the better by studying Dr. King and others who paved the way for a more just world. She pictured him bringing his painting home later on that week, and she smiled. **JPA**

**Names have been changed.*