Watching Jordan Grow | CPD

Jordan's relationship with the AT Lab began early, as he helped demonstrate that young children can use assistive technology. After a traumatic birth that he almost did not survive, Jordan Snell was revived and life-flighted to Salt Lake City. He was sent home with a feeding tube and low expectations. The doctors did not think he would ever walk or talk. Sixteen years later the story is very different. He is an honors student who has competed on the National Academic League. He has a ham radio license. Though he now lives in Arizona, he still returns to the Center for Persons with Disabilities to work in the Assistive Technology Lab. He has cerebral palsy. Jordan aspires to getting a doctorate in mechanical engineering. Already, people in his neighborhood come to him with their computer and fix-it problems. "It's the best of everything that you hope for, to be able to have the outcome that he's had and to have the future that he's going to have," said Amy Henningsen, an occupational therapist at the Center for Persons with Disabilities. Henningsen began working with Jordan when he was two months old, as he entered the center's Up to 3 program. Their relationship has deepened and grown throughout the years. Children with disabilities often begin "a pattern of learned helplessness" very early in their lives, Henningsen said. Jordan's family knew it was important to start working with him early to help him achieve as much independence as possible. Jordan's start on life was rough. He was an irritable, fussy baby who had sustained a serious brain injury. "As time progressed he got better and better," said his aunt, DeEtte Snell. "We gradually got him to where he could sit up. He was delayed in almost every area." At three or four years old he started walking with a walker. By the time he was five, his family's worries about his speech evaporated. They couldn't keep him quiet anymore. Other hardships hit Jordan's family; when he was a toddler his father was diagnosed with a terminal brain tumor. Henningsen babysat Jordan so his parents could have some time alone. Then Jordan's mother developed a brain cyst that put her in a coma. When she awakened, she had sustained a permanent brain injury that affected her short-term memory. The needs of Jordan's parents and of Jordan himself became great enough that they could not care for him, so Jordan lived for a month with his aunt DeEtte in Arizona before the family settled on a plan that would give him as much time as possible with his family. He lived in Logan with Henningsen and her husband, Dirk, during the week and spent the weekends with his parents and older siblings. He stayed in the Up to 3 program until he graduated and transitioned to the Children's Lab at Utah State University for preschool. He received speech and motor services through the Cache County School District and attended a private school for Kindergarten. After Jordan's father passed away in 2001, his family moved to Arizona. Jordon moved with them and lived with his aunt DeEtte in Mesa. He repeated first grade, DeEtte said, but he soon began working on his grade level. He has been in a mainstream classroom and has established his place on the honor roll. He uses aides, especially to help him write, but he has learned to use computer technology more and rely on aides less. "We've tried to make it as normal as we can while recognizing that there are limitations," DeEtte said. "We're just so proud of everything he's accomplished." When he's not in school he's honing his mechanical skills, working in the AT lab, fixing things in the neighborhood, finding out what was wrong with the Henningsen camper's air conditioner. The AT Lab has helped him learn how to adapt the things he does every day, said Jordan. "I have a hard time with screws because I'm so shaky, but if I can hold the screw in my hand, it's no problem." Using two hands helps him compensate for the shaking. His least favorite job in the lab is cleaning the shop--which is more proof that he's a normal guy.