Building on protective skills allows for parents to improve their entire family’s wellness. Clinicians work with parents to improve child safety, build a supportive community, and develop a stronger parent-child connection.

The impact of trauma on a child’s developing brain can have long-term mental health consequences. Often parents have experienced trauma themselves, and have struggled with it throughout their lives. By addressing trauma within the entire family, clinicians support families as they heal.

When youth are having behavioral health concerns, it is important that the entire family supports them in addressing what is driving their behavior. By developing individualized goals with Savio clinicians, families work together to empower their child to take charge of their own behavioral health.

While Savio offers 10 different therapeutic models, each family is paired with the treatment model that best addresses their needs and is proven to have positive long-term outcomes.
For every positive outcome, there is a unique story of a family that worked hard to be successful in the face of significant challenges. I hope sharing a story of one of these families can show you that even the most difficult behaviors can be understood and changed.

This report will feature the story of Alejo, who struggled with aggression. Savio had the privilege of guiding Alejo and his family, working to instill the belief that a family’s past does not define its future.

We would not be able to provide this support without your generosity. We are honored that you joined us in believing in Alejo and families like his. Ultimately, he and his family were able to create and sustain their own positive changes.

We know families are stronger together. And that many more families can reach these positive outcomes with the right guidance.

Norma Aguilar - Dave
Executive Director
Recess was over, but the 7th grade classroom remained empty.

A crowd had gathered in the cafeteria, chanting “fight, fight, fight”. Alejo punched Mark in front of all their peers, the security guard, and the principal. As soon as blood started gushing out of Mark’s nose, Alejo stepped back. Mark was rushed to the hospital.

3 days later, Alejo was in a juvenile court standing before a Judge Harper. “Why did you physically assault your classmate?” says the prosecutor. His forehead covered in sweat, Alejo responds, “Mark was picking on Sharon about her parents’ divorce and that just made me really angry, and I could not stop myself”. Judge Harper not only puts Alejo on probation but also refers him to services from Savio to address his aggression.
Caitlin, Savio adolescent therapist, drives 30 minutes north of Denver. She is greeted by an elderly lady who immediately welcomes her into the house. Pointing towards a short, grey-haired man in a blue mask, the lady says, “I am Alejo’s grandma and this is my husband.”

Grandma continues, “Alejo is my eldest son’s third child. His parents got divorced after his first birthday. Both my son and ex-daughter-in-law, Sarah, were struggling with substance use at the time. Alejo’s grandfather and I divorced several years ago. After Sarah gave birth to three more children and started struggling financially, Alejo bounced from my son’s house to my ex-husband’s to mine. A few days ago, I received a call from my ex-husband who said he could no longer take care of a teenager boy. As you can see, this is a new marriage for me. This was supposed to be us giving life a second chance. But here we are trying to raise yet another teenager.”

As an experienced adolescent therapist, Caitlin knew that teenage boys were typically not as intimidating as their court record reflected. Still, she was surprised when she first met Alejo- a skinny thirteen year old who was too timid to make eye contact.

When Caitlin asked Alejo what triggered his fight with Mark, he responded, “He was saying mean things to... but why should I tell you anything?” It did not take Caitlin long to realize that Alejo did not trust her.
Chapter III - Who is Alejo?

BETTER UNDERSTANDING ALEJO

Caitlin started to spend three 2-hour sessions with Alejo each week. First, she spent considerable time trying to understand Alejo’s surroundings and family dynamics. Caitlin uncovered that his initial reluctance to trust her stemmed from a time he felt his privacy was invaded because a former therapist disclosed that Alejo was planning to harm himself. Caitlin began to understand his reluctance in trusting her but constantly reminded him, “I promise you will always be the first person to know if I ever have to report you for anything”.

One day, Alejo confessed to Caitlin that he had smoked when he went to go visit his mom’s house. She got up from her chair and said, “I’m going to have to inform grandma, but we can either tell grandma together or I can just tell her myself with your permission”

“One okay, I’ll go get her and we can talk about it”, said Alejo

BUILDING TRUST

NOW THAT ALEJO WAS BEGINNING TO TRUST CAITLIN, IT WAS TIME TO DIG DEEPER

LACK OF STABILITY

Stability, an essential criterion for a child’s growth and development, was always lacking in Alejo’s life. Little Alejo spent time with both parents until his Dad missed several court hearings and lost custody. With three additional children, Alejo’s mom struggled to make ends meet, so she sent him to live with his grandparents. Since Alejo’s grandparents were also divorced, he was getting bounced from home to home. Thus, there was no structure at home, no rules, and no real consequences. He lacked a sense of belonging.

WITNESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Trauma, a common underlying cause of aggression, crept into his life rather early. Alejo’s parents got divorced when he was an infant. Dad remarried and started a new family but Mom started dating an abusive partner. Little Alejo grew up witnessing domestic violence and feeling helpless because his tiny limbs could not protect his mom from a man thrice his size with 20 times his might. Now that he is older, he fights to protect himself and others – something he could not do for his mom.
Chapter IV - Drivers of Change

**ALEJO**

Caitlin started witnessing Alejo’s commitment to personal change and growth. He channeled all his energy to stay fit for his football season. He also realized the importance of staying fit to train well. He told Caitlin that he would never smoke again, even if there were no way for him to get caught. To cope with his anger issues, Alejo began taking 15-minute walks every time he felt annoyed by his siblings or grandparents.

**DRIVEN BY PURPOSE**

Caitlin quickly noticed that Alejo was very protective of the people he loved. He had immense respect for his grandma. Caitlin helped Alejo realize how his behaviors were causing his grandma distress. Alejo recognized that he not only needed to stay away from fighting at school but also needed to work on communicating with her with utmost respect at home.

**ROLE MODEL**

Talking to Caitlin helped grandma realize that she needed to set the right example for Alejo to follow. Her first step was to control her anger in front of him. She worked on warming up to him, listening to him like a friend first, and giving him space when he seemed upset.

**CAITLIN**

**COMMUNICATION LEADER**

Caitlin helped step-grandpa build a relationship with Alejo so that step-grandpa could take charge in Grandma’s absence. He started taking Alejo to football practice, coaching him, and buying sports gear. Step-grandpa became a support system for his wife and Alejo.

**SUPPORT SYSTEM**

**GRANDMA**

**STEP-GRANDPA**
Caitlin accompanied Alejo and his family to the last court hearing.

Judge Harper was impressed by Alejo's improvement. There were no new charges, Alejo's grandmother testified about his improved behavior, and his school shared that his behavior and academics had noticeably improved.

Caitlin was also able to talk to the judge about all the positives the family had been working on.

"Seeing Alejo's progress and perseverance, I declare this case closed" said Judge Harper.

When Alejo visited his mother, Grandma would be less than 30 minutes away. He was only allowed to visit people if grandma was in town, and he knew he could call her to pick him up if he ever needed.

Alejo was going to call grandma if he ever had the urge to smoke, and Grandma promised she would not get mad. This way she could understand what was going on and talk him through it.

The family and the school worked to create an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for Alejo so that his teachers could better support him if he needed to sit outside the classroom or take a break to cope with his aggression or anxiety.
On average, it costs Savio $6,250 per family to provide a sustainable intervention. Our supporters allow 2,000 families to receive these life-changing services at no cost.
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