

# ‘NANO’

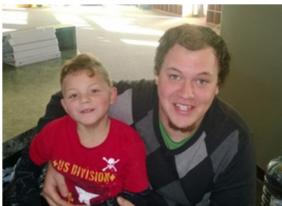
By Jordan Grant

The first day Mariano Sanchez was dropped off at the Boys & Girls Club of Bloomfield was quite a day for all of us. While he was incredibly energetic and playful, we quickly realized our normal methods of child-handling and discipline would have to give way to a trial-and-error-type learning experience for us. Little did we know, this child would open our eyes, to the fact that all children must be managed in different ways and are persuaded and driven by various things.



Mariano “Nano” Sanchez hopped off the bus excitedly on his first day at our Club. With Mariano being a kindergartener we had no idea what to expect. He ran inside with his first order of business being to show everything he had collected in his backpack from school that day. “Teacher, teacher!” he yelled as he pulled on my shirt, “Look!” He quickly dumped his backpack on the table and began to give me the full tour. After we finally got everything back into his bag, he finished his snack and joined the other boys in a game of “Chase Each Other in Circles”. I asked them to stop and they all slowed to a walk...all except Mariano. It was as if he didn’t hear me at all. I repeated myself several times to no avail. I quickly learned that Mariano required his own personal protocol. In speaking with his grandmother, we came up with different ideas to further help him exceed expectations not only here at our facility, but wherever he goes.

Figuring out the best course of discipline and learning for any child is like putting together a puzzle with an infinite number of pieces that are constantly changing. Since Mariano’s first day, we’ve acquired an understanding of what it is that drives him and what tools we can use to teach him. Within his first week as a member he had become brazen enough to scream at us, hit us, even leave the Club building - entirely in an attempt to outrun and test us. We quickly realized that warnings and timeouts were not the answer, as the timeout corner was no match for Mariano.



One day, about a month after he started attending the afterschool program, Mariano decided that the best course of action against another child who would not share his toys was to hit him. I promptly escorted Mariano inside and informed him that he did not get to play outside for the rest of the afternoon. He, like any child, was not very happy. For about an hour he attempted to shove past me, even hitting me, as I stood guard at the door making sure he stayed inside. After some time I finally took him by the hand and sat him at the table. I calmed him down, as he had been crying, and softly explained why he didn’t get

to play outside and what his repercussions were. He nodded and apologized for hitting me. We sat together in timeout for the rest of playtime. That was the moment I realized that the way to reach this child was patience. The more time I spent with Mariano, the more I learned about him.

“Nano” and I have become quite close over the last couple of months. It doesn’t matter what room I’m working in or what grade I am in charge of, if I’m there, so is Mariano. Quietly racing his Hot Wheels around the room and stopping occasionally to show them to me again and again. When Mariano does have a behavioral problem I know the best solution is a little bit of time and unwavering direction. He has come to recognize consequences more quickly than before. It’s almost as if he knows what’s going to happen without me even having to say it. He tips his head up and asks, “Timeout?”. The moment I say yes he’s on his way.



Another way in which we have helped Mariano improve is with his daily interactions with other members. When he first came to us, Mariano was very combative and enjoyed playing alone more than socializing with the other children. If a fellow member did something he did not like his first reaction would be to yell at them or to simply hit them. Over time we helped him to understand that if he has an issue with someone, he needs to come and find one of the staff members and tell them rather than to react with anger. In the last few weeks Nano has improved greatly in this area. He plays with the other children and even shares his toys when others are not so quick to do so.

In recent days Mariano has improved greatly with his listening skills, social skills, and even loves to help around the club. Throwing fits and running away have become an increasingly rare occurrence. We still have our bad days, but, he’s always quick to apologize when he upsets another member even offering hugs and compliments. Good days and bad, we’re happy he’s around to continue to teach us patience and to be a source of energy when we run short.