Scholarship program helps special needs student

By Bobby Lewis,

If you walk through the Kuhn family’s home, you’ll hear a familiar tune.
“‘He sings, ‘Borrrrn in the USA!’” Mitchell said of his son, Malachi. “We’re like, actually, you’re not.”

The mini-Bruce Springsteen vocalist was adopted by the Kuhns last year from Ethiopia.

“It’s like a desert,” said 6-year old Malachi. “It’s fun here!”

Born with spina bifida, Malachi had a hard first five years of life. He spent his days sitting on the dirt floor of an Ethiopian orphanage.

Then the Kuhns, who set out wanting a healthy infant, fell in love with him after a trip to Africa.

“I joke that our life has been wrecked but really wrecked for the better,” said his mother, Kamden Kuhn.

“We wouldn’t have it any other way. Parenting Malachi is a huge challenge but we see it as a privilege and a blessing to confront the challenge.”

The challenge became more difficult after the lengthy adoption process was completed. Once Malachi was home in the United States, his medical bills were enormous.

Kamden called it, “a whirlwind of activity and a flurry of emotions.”

The family was told about a scholarship program that helps families with kids who have special needs, like spina bifida, Down Syndrome or autism. It’s called the Gardiner Scholarship and the Step Up For Students organization has handed out 6,163 of them to students this year.

“The Gardiner Scholarship program is a really unique program for truly special children,” said the Public Affairs Manager for Step Up For Students, Patrick Gibbons. “It allows parents access to education savings account that they can use to purchase a variety of educational products.”

Essentially, it’s an a la carte option for families.

“It’s empowering moms and dads,” said Gibbons.

Gardiner Scholarships can be used to pay for tuition fees at an eligible private school, therapies, tutoring or any other program deemed to aid in the education of special needs students.

It’s given Malachi Kuhn a chance to adjust to America, learn and grow physically in a way that would have been impossible before.

“He can stand up, walk and do all kinds of things that he wasn't able to do before he got here because of the scholarship,” said Mitchell.

Malachi smiled.

“My favorite superhero is Captain America.”

Step Up For Students’ Gardiner Scholarships are for Florida students from 3-years old to 12th grade. There is $76 million in scholarships available for 2016-17. To apply visit, StepUpForStudents.org (http://www.StepUpForStudents.org).

To view the WTSP-TV 10 News video broadcast visit: http://www.wtsp.com/entertainment/places/bobby-lewis-on-the-road/scholarship-program-helps-special-needs-students/315200059

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