



THE LIVES WE CHANGE

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ANNUAL
REPORT

LISTENING WITH EMPATHY

How one young
baseball star finally
found relief at Barrow
at Phoenix Children's

There was a point in Tyler Lakin's life when he struggled to put on a sock or a shoe without feeling unexplained pinching pain in his lower back. And that was before he had even turned 10.

"He started complaining of back pain early," says Tyler's mother, Sabrina Lakin. Tyler is large for his age — the now 15-year-old wears a size 14 shoe today — so Sabrina says she was unsure whether his pain stemmed

from growth spurts, or if it was more serious.

But by about age 10, Tyler started showing more concerning signs, particularly during and after his Little League baseball games. "He would come home from a game and lay there and cry," Sabrina says. "I just knew, this isn't your normal back pain."

The mother and son from Flagstaff, Arizona, sought answers from a variety of health care providers. Some suggested he had bulging discs or deterioration in his spine. Tyler tried visiting physical therapists and chiropractors — all the while, excelling in baseball. The pain would sometimes subside, but it always came back. "I just pitched through the pain," Tyler recalls.



Tyler Lakin is back on the mound after overcoming a disc herniation and surgical fusion (right).

This went on for years.

Then, on June 24, 2016, Tyler was pitching a game when his back gave out and he fell forward. He was debilitated. Sabrina continued to advocate for more answers from area doctors. But after months of ineffective options, Tyler was often sweating profusely and had lost so much of his athletic-level appetite that he dropped 45 pounds.



“I JUST KNEW, THIS ISN’T YOUR NORMAL BACK PAIN.”

—SABRINA LAKIN

That’s when Sabrina brought Tyler to Phoenix Children’s Hospital, where they met Jamal McClendon, MD, a neurosurgeon at Barrow at Phoenix Children’s, and Department of Neurosurgery at Mayo Clinic School of Medicine, Scottsdale.

“Dr. McClendon talked with us for a long time,” Sabrina says. “It was exactly what I needed — somebody to really listen to what was going on. Dr.

McClendon said he wanted to consider what he would do if this were his own son. He was amazing.”

DOCTOR ASKS, ‘WHAT WOULD I DO?’

It’s this approach to spine care — one of empathy and compassion — that makes Dr. McClendon a leading neurosurgeon at Barrow at Phoenix Children’s. “It goes a long way,” Dr. McClendon says. “I can only be myself. I interact with these patients’ parents and explain what I would do if I were in their situation.”

Tyler was diagnosed with an L5-S1 disc herniation with spondylolisthesis from a bilateral spondylolysis. In other words, he had a slippage of his spine. Dr. McClendon recommended a surgical fusion.

Tyler was throwing a baseball again just six weeks after the surgery. He was pitching competitively six months later. In fact, he was back on the same pitching mound on June 24, 2017, where his back gave out a year prior. And he’s no longer complaining of pain.

“If I didn’t advocate for my son and we didn’t meet Dr. McClendon, we’d still be going through this,” Sabrina says. “Tyler is being looked at for scholarships now. For Dr. McClendon to step in the way he did — he went beyond. When he did that, I felt relieved.”

‘THERE’S A HUMANISTIC QUALITY’

Dr. McClendon credits the level of unmatched service found at Barrow and Phoenix Children’s Hospital.

“Patients are not treated as numbers here,” he says. “There’s a humanistic quality [here].

“When you wake up in the morning, there are some things that you can’t really predict,” Dr. McClendon adds, “but by and large, there’s an overwhelming sense of greatness that comes through these doors, knowing that you’re going to help patients by fixing a problem not only physically, but also emotionally. Taking care of children is a great privilege. It’s enriching to be here.”

Barrow at Phoenix Children’s treats children of neurological diseases so they can live happy and healthy lives.



Dr. Jamal McClendon

THE FUTURE OF SPINE CARE

Jamal McClendon, MD, came to Barrow at Phoenix Children’s in 2016 because he knew it would be a place where he and his colleagues could grow.

“I have partners focused in orthopedics and neurosurgery who not only believe in me, but also believe in what we can accomplish together,” Dr. McClendon says. “I feel that we all benefit from each other, and we’re better because of each other, actually.”

To that end, Dr. McClendon and co-director, Dr. Greg White of the Herbert J. Louis Center for Pediatric Orthopedics have a vision for marrying neurosurgery and orthopedic surgery into one spine program at Phoenix Children’s. He says that’s possible thanks to the already healthy overlap of expertise between these two departments at Phoenix Children’s, as well as the level of collaboration here that is not seen anywhere else.

“The hope is that we will offer a spine program that is comprehensive,” Dr. McClendon says. “It’s something very special that we have here. In five to 10 years, there won’t be a division between orthopedics and neurosurgery spine care at Phoenix Children’s, because essentially that doesn’t even exist now.”