

by Heidi Reyst, Ph.D., CBIS-CE

By all accounts, Ben Raby was a typical 17 year old. He was somewhat rebellious and he frequently liked to test limits. But in 1998, he was involved in a motor vehicle accident in which he suffered a traumatic brain injury. Shortly after his accident, Ben attempted to go back to school to continue his sophomore year and admittedly "had a real hard time." He tried therapy on an outpatient basis, but his mother Lori knew that more would be needed. "He *looked* ok, but things weren't all right." Ben's impulsivity increased, his concentration and word-finding were impaired and he grew increasingly depressed. He began to threaten his parents and act out disruptively.

His behaviors grew worse, and in late 1998, Ben was emergently admitted into A Place for Kids on a Saturday afternoon due to behavioral difficulties. Despite the problems he was having Ben was not aware of the impact that the accident had on his life. He was extremely resistant to therapy and adjusting to living in a home with other teens was difficult. And he found life in a new city far from his family to be difficult.

Ben's treatment team challenged, supported and worked with him. As time passed, and as Ben was made accountable for his progress, he began to realize how much the accident had changed his life. He thought about the consequences of his actions, *before* he acted and he realized that fighting the system wasn't benefitting him at all. And somewhere along the way, something different happened...he worked with his team, instead of against it, and he began to make some decisions that would change his life forever.

Ben's most important decision was that he would graduate from high school on time. This was no small task for a 17 year old sophomore who had always put school on the back burner – "A GED wasn't good enough, I wanted a real diploma." From there, Ben set his sights on that goal.

Ben soon began to reveal his fighting spirit in adaptive ways and he learned to channel that new energy into advocacy. For instance, he questioned his physician over a choice of medications he prescribed. Ben independently tracked down a Physicians Desk Reference, researched his medication and learned about its benefits and side effects. After speaking with his doctor, they determined a different medication with fewer side effects would be a better choice.

Ben also began to experience successes in the program and at school. He moved his way up to the Highmeadow, the young adult home, and eventually to the Semi-Independent Townhouse Program. At school, he became a student board member, was on the student roundtable, and he received an award where he was chosen to shadow the superintendent for a day. He tutored elementary school children on the weekend,

and taught computer skills to seniors. He also worked at a local skating rink and became a dependable employee, entrusted to collect and count money at the concession stand. Through it all, Ben met his main goal. He not only graduated on time – he was also the community school valedictorian. At his commencement speech, Ben's presence in front of his peers took the crowd from yelling and throwing beach balls to rapt attention.

As Dr. Mariann Young, Rainbow's Director of Pediatric Services put it "it went from pure chaos, to where you could hear a pin drop – Ben clearly took his speech seriously and he really did a great job."

Today Ben recognizes that "the structure of the house and program was the key – there was always someone there to help." When asked about his experiences, he said "it was a good experience

overall, Rainbow had it together." If you ask his mother, the key factor for her was "support, support, support - Rainbow helped us to understand what was happening with Ben. Mariann and the team challenged him. It was a hard time, and I can't express how much Rainbow helped. The connection we made was very positive." Ben's success would make any mother proud, and you can see it in Lori's eyes.

Since moving back home in 2000 Ben has had a couple of different jobs, moved into his own apartment and purchased a car, and enrolled in school to become a welder. Despite his successes, times have been tough too. He was recently laid off from his job – in large part to tough economic times, and now he intermittently installs carpet to make ends meet. Undaunted, and in clear Ben fashion, he used the experience to advocate. He wrote a letter to Governor Granholm to let her know that our country's reliance on oil is costing people jobs and ruining the environment, and that too many jobs are leaving the state.

Though his immediate future is not as clear as he would like it to be, Ben is a resilient young man. If past performance predicts future performance, it's a good bet that there's a little more fight left. At least now that Ben has learned that fighting the system can work for you when channeled in the right direction. §



Ben & his mom Lori.