

Archiving Resiliency Through Youth Testimony

Alex's Story of Resiliency

- **Introduction:** I love baseball, going outside, playing with my 2 dogs. I'm 9 years old and am going into the 4th grade.
- **My Journey:** I started having trouble with my moods when I was 6 years old. I started on medication, and it helped; I also got into a wrestling program to help with some of my anger. I started 2nd grade and my teachers weren't very helpful. They yelled at me big time when my behaviors were difficult, they didn't seem to understand or tolerate me, and I got kicked out of school. Within 10 days I was enrolled at a new school where I finished the 2nd grade. In 2nd grade I made the Merit Roll, and went on to 3rd grade. I made it halfway through 3rd grade. I got upset in class one day, and I asked to go to the office to call my mom, which is part of my IEP. But, the teachers didn't follow the IEP, and I got really angry. I picked up a chair and threw it at the window in the door. Well, I got kicked out of that school. Then I started at yet another school and was there for 3 weeks and I got kicked out again. This time I was trying to go to my "safe place" because I was upset and overwhelmed. I ended up getting into a tug of war with a teacher who was trying to keep the door wide open, and I got really angry. When I get really angry, I sometimes kick things – which I did, and I got kicked out of that school, too. Even when I think about all the schools I've been kicked out of, I still get really angry that the teachers and principals didn't get it – they didn't understand me or listen to what I was telling them, like, that I needed to call my mom or go to my safe place to calm myself down. Then recently I saw more and more of my friends from more of the schools I went to, and it seemed that they still liked me, because, when you have true friends they stick with you no matter what the situation!
- **Educate:** First, my dad doesn't know anything about mood disorders and it's very hard to connect with him. Plus, I only see him every other week, so it's even harder to connect with him. It's very hard to regulate your mood, and I feel like my feelings are all out of control. I have constant rages, medicine isn't always at the right level, and I don't feel normal. Sometimes I can't go to sleep at night and it lasts for weeks. The last time this happened, I thought maybe I need to have one of my meds adjusted – so I told my mom this, and then we told my doctor about it at my next appointment. It's really hard to explain this to people.
- **Resilience:** I move on, go with the flow, I don't stay stuck where I'm at. My sensory toys at school also help me, and my relationships with my mom and my psychiatrist help a lot. He's a good guy, treats me nice and has lots of sports stuff in his office...and, he gets it! He doesn't yell at me or get mad at me when I do something at school that gets me in trouble. My mom helps me a lot, too. My mom understands why I do what I do sometimes, and she's an advocate, too. She helps other parents and kids who have a mental illness. I also use my focus on baseball to help cope with my illness. I make a lot of new friends and they cheer for me, plus I'm pretty good in baseball, and that makes me feel good about myself. To keep strong, I need friends, a good clinician who gets it, and my faith.

- **Barriers to my resiliency:** Certain school principals who really don't get it, and people who don't understand what it's like to live with a mood disorder, who make judgments about me without really knowing me. To improve my resiliency, we need to educate the school system about mental illnesses.
- **My advice to others:** If you have a mood disorder, try to get stable on your medicine, try your best not to get moody, don't curse people out, and try to talk to someone about your feelings...and just keep on truckin'!
- **What others can do to help:** Others could help me by cutting me some slack and trying to understand me and my illness. They could help my family by being nice, by offering to help out, or support me and my family during my illness.