

Archiving Resiliency Through Youth Testimony

Rachel's Story of Resiliency

- **Introduction:** My name is Rachel, and I'm **16 years old**. I'm going into the 11th grade. I have ADHD, which makes my life both challenging and more exciting. I really like to listen to music – everything but classical, and I play soccer and run track.
- **My Experience:** I was diagnosed in 4th grade with ADHD, but had symptoms as early as the 1st grade, which I wasn't really aware of. I was diagnosed with depression in 6th grade – that was mostly related to a lot of bullying that I was experiencing at school. One of my greatest challenges has been finding the right medication - I've been on every ADHD medication there is, and the side effects have been terrible. Currently I'm on Adderall XR, and that seems to be helping so far – keeps me from being too hyper and enables me to focus and function at home and at school. I still struggle with the depression at times, but I'm able to manage it pretty well on my own, without any medication. Initially, having ADHD and depression made it difficult for me to make and keep friends, but now I'm much more secure and confident in who I am, so it's not really a problem.
- **Educate:** Other people, and teachers, especially, need to try and understand the person from their perspective, and if they don't understand the diagnosis or behaviors, they should ask for information or try to find out more about it so they can understand the person better. I think people need to keep an open mind when dealing with kids in general, but especially those with emotional and/or behavioral disorders.

I've found that it's a lot easier to have friends who also have ADHD – they understand what I'm going through because they've been through it themselves.

- **Resiliency:** Definitely, friends, family and music! I like to listen to my iPod when I'm upset or depressed and kind of tune the rest of the world out for awhile – which actually helps me focus more. My friends and family help to support me when I'm struggling with my illness; likewise, when I'm feeling well, I'm able to help my friends out by being there and listening to them – and that makes me happy, makes me feel good about myself. I really like to help others – that is a big part of what makes me resilient – and I do this by speaking locally at schools and at some state and national conferences, about my experiences living with ADHD.
- **Barriers to resilience:** I have a really hard time dealing with change – I prefer to have things pretty set and structured in my life. I had to change schools in my freshman year, and that was totally stressful and disastrous!
- **My advice to others:** Find at least one good friend that you can really talk to about how you're feeling, what you're experiencing – and make sure that they are a really good listener. They will need to understand what you're sharing with them so they can support you when you need it. I also think it's important to find ways to help others, because you're always helping yourself at

the same time, and it makes you feel good about yourself. I always feel really great after I give a talk and someone comes up to me and tells me they could really identify with me, with what I was saying...I have met some amazing people this way and have developed some wonderful friendships as well.

- **How others can help:** The mental health system should work to make support groups an integral part of the system, too. They need to be easily accessible and at times when people can attend them. I think it's really important for other parents to find a support group that they can engage in – they need an outlet for their feelings, frustrations and struggles, too. Also, people need to keep an open mind and educate themselves as much as possible about what it's like to live with a mental illness.