

Archiving Resiliency Through Youth Testimony

Amanda's Resiliency Story

- **Introduction:** My name is Amanda and I just turned 18. I am starting my senior year in high school, where I am very involved in SADD, the Key Club, Show Choir, and Marching Band. I'm also very active at my church – I sing in the Choir and participate in the youth group. I live with my mom and dad, my brother, my dog, cat and a fish.
- **My Journey:** I have ADD and Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) with panic attacks. I was diagnosed in elementary school with ADD and later with GAD in March 2007.

Living with both illnesses is pretty awful – especially the panic attacks - they're very scary- because I don't know when they are going to come, or how long they'll last. My anxiety is connected to my migraine headaches. The more anxious I get, the more migraines I suffer. It's a vicious cycle, because the migraine keeps me from being able to do my school work or other activities, and then I get all stressed and anxious about what I didn't get finished!

Educate: Sometimes I feel stupid in class because no matter how hard I try to pay attention and understand what is being taught, I just can't get the hang of it.

I finally figured out that the more I studied the worse I did on my tests and school work, because I just didn't understand the material. So I started asking my teachers for extra help either before or after school, and that has helped a lot. Also, I tell them that I need to sit in the front of the room away from distractions, not near the door or windows. My mom, some of my teachers and friends help me to break down my assignments into smaller pieces, so I can manage the task at hand. This helps give me a sense of accomplishment, and encourages me to work on the next task or assignment. However, I still struggle with not feeling overwhelmed with everything I need to do, and my initial reaction is to try and run away from it. I get very anxious and eventually I realize I need help to manage the workload. That's where the support of good friends, my mom and my teachers comes into play.

I really have to take care of myself first, otherwise I don't tolerate some of the challenging relationships in my family as well and I get very irritated and stressed. This is when I usually go to my grandma's for a few days or weeks until I can calm down and regroup. When I'm feeling good, I'm able to use a calmer tone of voice and can help out my family.

- **Resilience:** I love to socialize, hang out with my friends, be involved with my church. I'm a very outgoing person and I want to try everything at least once...I love life –and McDonald's coffee! I used to deal with my anxiety and my brother by completely withdrawing from everyone – I would keep to myself and stay in my room listening to music. Then, last year, my mom and dad sent me to stay at my Grandma's for a couple of months because I was starting to get really agitated and was physically fighting with my brother. Grandma's was a safe haven and I didn't have any additional responsibilities around the house, although I still helped my grandma out.

Without the added stress and distractions, I was able to regain my focus and deal with my emotions in a more healthy and productive way. I got involved with my school work and activities and my friends again and was able to successfully complete my junior year.

- **Barriers to resilience:** The school environment could have been a lot more accommodating and supportive for my ADD and anxiety disorder. They just didn't seem to understand that I couldn't control how I felt or what was happening to me. Another barrier is that the school and my church did not accept one of my family members for who they were as a person, and just wanted them removed, which was horribly embarrassing and distressing for me.
- **My advice to others:** I would tell others to get involved with outside interests, get their mom to help fix things at school, know that it will get better, and figure out what you need to do to take care of yourself.
- **What others can do to help:** Everyone (church, school, neighbors, society in general) needs to just learn to accept others for who they are, whether they have a mental illness or not! Sometimes my counselors are not as helpful as I'd like them to be – like they don't get it either – I'd like them to try and understand things from my point of view.