

Imagine driving your car in a tropical storm. Rain hammers the windshield making it nearly impossible to see the road. Heavy crosswinds buffet the car, making it difficult to control. Raising our eight year old son, Ben, has been like driving in a storm. We can't anticipate the twists and turns in his behavior, and it seems that his direction is influenced by forces we cannot see. In the years that we have struggled to understand Ben, he has been diagnosed with ADHD and Asperger's Syndrome, and possibly Bipolar Disorder.

Because of Ben's unpredictable and extreme impulsiveness, aggressiveness, and even his giddiness, we have experienced many difficulties and frustrations. Beyond our own challenges as parents, Ben faces his own challenges as a boy with developmental delays. He struggles to make and keep friends. Some teachers interact with him as if he has complete control over his behavior, and view him as a trouble maker. Sadly, these negative interactions have affected the way that Ben views himself.

Raising Ben continues to be stressful for our entire family. Ben's siblings do not understand why they are treated differently. My husband and I have struggled over the years about how to best parent Ben. Two years ago, I heard about The ARC of Durham. Eager for support, I decided to browse the web site. Right on their home page, I was comforted to read that part of the Arc's mission is to help children and adults with developmental disabilities live, learn, work, and play in our Durham community. After all, we hope that Ben will someday be an active and productive member of our society.

By the end of my first conversation with an Arc staff member, I enrolled in the "Respite Program". This program enables my husband and me to leave the children under the supervision of an adult who can handle Ben's behavior so that we can spend time together -- even if it's something as simple as going shopping. The Respite Program is just one of the many programs the Arc supports. Another is "First In Families", a family support initiative that offers financial support and other resources to families having children with developmental delays. Durham's Partnership for Children, a Smart Start Initiative, assists with developmental supports for children ages 0-5. The self-advocacy program, Common Ground, assists adults with developmental delays as they become more independent, develop leadership and social skills, and increase their community involvement. The "Public Advocacy and Community Education Program" strives to educate the community about what people with developmental disabilities and their families want and need to succeed.

We have faced many challenges while raising Ben. The support that we receive from The Arc has helped to calm our storm.