

Local Teen Impacts the Environment

Asperger's syndrome along with depression and anxiety could severely limit a person; however, one local teen has not let these conditions control his life.

Michael Browne, 17, of Milton, recently graduated from The Manville School at Judge Baker Children's Center. The teachers and therapists at Manville helped Michael manage and understand his condition, ensuring that he will be successful during his last two years of high school at Beacon High (the Manville School only provides education through the end of grade ten.) Asperger's syndrome is a developmental disorder similar to autism. People with Asperger's can have weak social skills and prefer sameness and routine.

Michael is currently active in the Eagle Scouts. An Eagle Scout is the highest rank attainable in the Boy Scouting program of the Boy Scouts of America. To attain his Eagle Scout rank, a Scout must complete a leadership service project. When Michael was looking for his project idea, he investigated the consequences of losing lead sinkers (weights) when fishing. He found that lead sinkers kill thousands of water fowl each year. Up to 52% of loons, up to 25% of bald eagles and up to 32% of trumpeter swans die of lead poisoning every year. The information he found

connected him with the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), the Wildlife Society, TURI (Toxic Use Reduction Institute) and other environmental agencies.

"Michael wanted to educate fisherman about this problem, so he created information packets including non-lead sinkers to distribute," said Michael's mother Patricia Browne. "And then he went out to fishing derbies, exchanging his environmentally friendly weights for the lead weights in tackle boxes. He figured out pretty quickly that the key to his project's success is educating the public about the dangers of lead."

For his efforts and work in providing education and solutions for this environmental problem, Michael received numerous awards, and was chosen to represent the United States at the United Nations Environmental Program in Gothenburg, Sweden.

Michael's Asperger's and anxiety were not a factor as he spoke in front of an international audience of over 1,000. He also received awards from the Wildlife Society, Field & Stream magazine, citations from the Massachusetts House and Senate, and won the President's Environmental Youth Award, which was presented by President Bush at the Rose Garden Ceremony. His project has been cited by Secretary of the Interior

Dirk Kempthorne, US Fish and Wildlife Director H. Dale Hall and Steve Johnson, Director of the EPA. Michael has also been a featured speaker at numerous events.

At 17 years old, Michael has already received great recognition and experienced many amazing things. "Two years ago he would not have been able to do all of this," said Patricia Browne. "All of these opportunities to speak and get to know people have provided an eye opening experience. We see how much Michael has grown. He has worked very hard, using the tools he learned at the Manville School."

Michael lives with Asperger's syndrome, and may have challenges with social interactions, but it will not limit his future. He spent the first part of this summer participating in a recreation of the Oregon Trail which will be shown on PBS and distributed to schools throughout the US. He lived on the trail in a covered wagon and traveled through Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho and Oregon.

After returning from his Oregon Trail experience, Michael is working at the EPA for the summer. Part of his job responsibilities will be to expand and continue his lead fishing weight program. After high school, he will attend college to study engineering. What he learned from his Boy Scout Eagle project has laid a great foundation for his future success.

