

Belle's Story

by Teresa Parker, MSSW Kids Ranch Mental Wellness Coordinator

Here is a beautiful and uplifting story about a young girl with new dreams about her future!

We met Belle this past summer when she attended the Kids Ranch's day camp. She was a fifth grader who was incredibly quiet and shy and seemed to struggle to talk with the other campers. However, with a bit of encouragement, she could participate in activities, and overall, she had an enjoyable time at camp.

During our two-week day camp, we regularly have small mental health groups where the children learn to build resiliency and learn new coping and communication skills. They are taught how to challenge their negative beliefs and assumptions and the importance of setting healthy boundaries.

During the first week of camp, I met with Belle one-on-one to give her a Self-Esteem Check-Up and to ask how we could make it easier for her to interact with other kids. During my first mental health meeting with Belle, she told me that a girl in her class was bullying her. She described the put-downs the girl often told her and said she felt bad about herself every time it happened. Sadly, she said she didn't know how to stand up for herself. Belle said that she felt awkward and different from the other kids and found it extremely hard to talk with them. That day, we rehearsed some ways that Belle could protect herself from this bullying. I asked her parents to speak with the school counselor before the next school year and to put some protections in place.

When I asked Belle what school is like, she said she was "way behind" in reading and often did not understand what she read. This made her anxious and embarrassed. She said, "I'm so far behind the others in reading, and it makes me feel sad that I am not as smart as the other students in my class."

From everything I learned about Belle that day and from my observation of her during the camp's activities, I suspected that Belle had AD/HD, with very significant inattention features. This is a particular type of AD/HD often referred to as "ADHD, Predominantly Inattentive Type." Unfortunately, in my decades of work as a Child and Family Therapist, I have found that it is rarely identified, diagnosed, or treated, leaving hundreds of children far behind in school and losing hope for their future with each passing year. Undiagnosed and untreated ADHD leaves them vulnerable to a whole host of mental disorders in their adult years, including depressive and anxiety disorders, sleep disorders, addictions, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), and autoimmune diseases.

I asked Belle to help me call her parents and report my impressions to them. I met with her parents during the two weeks of camp, asking permission to do an AD/HD evaluation of Belle. The parents agreed to supply Belle's school records; this allowed me to do a complete evaluation using all of the valuable information from past years.

Belle's parents said they had been trying for three years to find the underlying cause of this, i.e., why Belle had such a hard time learning in school, but every intervention they tried turned out to be inconclusive. They said they were frustrated and didn't know where to turn for help. In talking with them, I discovered that both parents are diagnosed with Adult AD/HD, and both were diagnosed late in life after experiencing many losses and disappointments.

With each new school record, I found more evidence that Belle had struggled in school since her early grades; she had problems with learning and remembering, focusing and sustaining attention, and she experienced low self-esteem. To me, all the information pointed to the classic features of Inattentive ADHD.

Information On This Type of ADHD

ADHD affects both long-term and working memory. The impact of ADHD on memory makes learning more challenging, as this affects a person's ability to store, manipulate, and generalize information. Imagine the difficulty this causes when learning to read and spell! People with Inattentive ADD also have difficulty focusing and sustaining attention, remembering details, and often misplacing items needed for a task. No wonder Belle felt tired and defeated in school; she said the harder she tried, the worse things got.

The evidence was overwhelming! Belle had AD/HD, with Predominantly Inattentive Features. I sent the completed evaluation to Belle's doctor and requested a medication trial for Belle. It took several weeks to get an appointment; in the meantime, I spoke with Belle and informed her about her new diagnosis. She seemed tentatively hopeful but still slightly scared of what all this meant.

While We Waited – Teaching Belle to Read

Two months ago, Belle entered our Kids Ranch Literacy Program, where we teach struggling children to read. The child meets with a specially trained tutor twice weekly and does homework between the meetings. Kids Ranch uses a multi-sensory approach called Synthesizing Phonics that is neurologically based and highly effective in teaching right-brain learners. Belle was motivated to learn using the program and started to see progress in her reading ability.

Mountain High Success!

Wednesday, November 29, 3rd Day of Medication

I wrote in my journal: Today, Belle blew me away with her reading, how well she focused, and how hard she worked. She was tenacious!

She said, "Teresa, I have something to tell you...I started on my new medicine on Sunday (3 days prior), and I'm so happy you told my parents about my ADD. My medicine changes everything!" Her eyes got big and glistened with tears. I asked her about the changes she had noticed, what her school experience had been like before, and what it was like now. What she said brought me to tears, and her eyes welled up with tears when she spoke.

I asked. "Belle, what do you notice is different now in school, in how you learn?"

"I focus a lot better. So much better, actually! I can listen a long time to my teacher, and she doesn't have to keep calling my name."

"I learn things more easily now because I can pay attention and understand now."

"Now I know the answers to my teacher's questions, and that helps me feel more confident."

"It feels like I'm smarter now. I actually looked at my reading score, and it improved to a score of average reading for my grade. Before I came here and took medicine, my score was very low."

"And now, I know what to say when I want to make a friend. I don't shy away like I did before. My new friendships are already beginning. And they say my name and include me now."

"Now I feel like my self-esteem has already grown a lot since I started the medicine. I mean that what I feel about myself and think about myself is way more positive than it was before."

"I take the same medicine as my dad, except mine are chewable because I still have a problem swallowing my pills."

"It feels like a new beginning for me. I know I have a double dose of ADD because both my mom and my dad both have it, but it's all OK! The medicine makes it all better! And I have hope for my future now."

I had one last question to ask Belle, "What would you say to a parent or parents of a child who has ADD and has the same symptoms as you do?"

"I would say, 'Please listen to Teresa because she knows a lot and she understands. And think about your child and what medicine can do to help them. It changes everything! And I am so happy.'" (Great big smile and a big hug!)

Unbelievable utterances from this fifth-grade girl, who is so smart and so excited about how she can focus, listen, comprehend, organize her thoughts, express her ideas and feelings, talk to other girls for the first time, and believe in herself and in her future! Oh my gosh, what a difference! An unbelievable miracle of a new life, like she was born anew!

I asked Belle for permission to write her story to teach people how important it is to recognize, diagnose, and treat Inattentive ADD. I promised her I would hide her identity so no one would know the story was about her. She said, "Yes, I want you to tell them and tell them it's "Belle's Story". Hers is a story that I have felt called to write for two years concerning the hidden and powerful disability of this type of ADHD and how it steals life and hope from our children.



Thank you, Belle, for allowing us to share your story. I am so proud of you!

NOTE: If you want more information about identifying and treating the different types of AD/HD, please see Dr. Daniel Amen's book, "Healing ADD, The Breakthrough Program that Allows You to See and Heal from the 7 Types of ADD"