



Ryan Paszkowski was born a healthy, happy, bouncing baby boy. He was always full of energy. When he was 12 months old, Ryan developed spinal meningitis. This made him very sick and put him in the hospital for 2-3 weeks. He had 6-8 grand mal seizures, high temperature, and other complications. He did recover from the meningitis, but because of excessive nerve damage, Ryan completely lost the hearing in his right ear.

A toddler just learning how to walk is difficult enough. Being totally off-balance because of a hearing loss makes it even more so. Ryan was constantly falling, bumping into things and getting hurt. We called him 'Baby Bumpkins'. He had trouble with balance for years. Our family doctor suggested we take him to TREC for help with balance, and also to help him socialize. After being in the hospital so much, poked and prodded, he did not like people much, and had no trust in others. This was more than 'shy'. He really did not like 'people' - he would not even look at them.

We started him with TREC when he was about 5. They were all wonderful – the instructors and the volunteers. They spoke to him but did not press him to answer them. They helped him not feel so intimidated on such a large animal, and therefore, also helped him not feel so intimidated with them, the volunteers. They got him to actually look at them and smile, sometimes even answer a question. This alone was a milestone.

Riding a horse gave him the feeling of coordinated walking. This helped so much with his balance. The instructor had him do stretching exercises while on the horse to help with strength and balance.

Ryan was in TREC for about 4 years and loved every day of it. I saw it help so much with both his balance and his trust in people. I also saw it help so many others in his class at TREC. It was such a good feeling see one of the riders accomplish something they previously could not do.

The volunteers and parents always loved seeing the riders laugh and smile. The volunteers are warm, caring, and very special people. They are people with just a little extra time in their week to not just give others their help, but to get a warm feeling of being able to help someone less fortunate, in return.

Today Ryan is 26 years old, has graduated from college and graduate school with his bachelors in plastic engineering and a masters in mechanical engineering. He lives and works in Cincinnati and is engaged to be married. We are very proud of him and his accomplishments. He has come a long way from that untrusting and confused, little boy.

I am now a volunteer for TREC, an organization that will always have a special place in my heart, trying to give others a better sense of security, balance and a little love.

Barb Paszkowski, mother and TREC volunteer