



# OUR STORIES

THRIVING AFTER BRAIN INJURY

**MAB**  
**Community Services**

*Annual Gala*  
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## **Our Stories**

A dramatic reading based on the life stories of Ivy Street School students

### **Narrator**

Brain Injury is the leading cause of death and disability among children and young adults in the United States. Because the effects of a brain injury are often invisible, the magnitude of the problem is not widely recognized. Because a child's brain is still developing, an injury can result not only in physical and cognitive impairment but in dysfunctional behavior and difficulties in relating to others. The Ivy Street School is one of a handful of schools in the entire country that focus on brain injury and have the expertise necessary to help these children develop the skills they need to have full and satisfying lives as adults. The Ivy Street School makes a huge difference in the life chances of their students. These are some of their stories.

### **James**

One night when I was sixteen, I was driving with three friends in my mother's car. We were seeing how fast the car would go but we hit a slippery spot and I panicked and pulled up the emergency brake. Only Emily was wearing a seat belt. Everyone else was thrown out of the car. A helicopter flew me to a hospital in Boston. My two other friends died instantly. I don't remember anything before or after the accident. This is what they tell me.

### **Irina**

I was born in Romania. My mother drank while she was pregnant with me and gave me Fetal Alcohol Effects. At first I lived with my mom and dad in Bucharest, but my dad took all the money and they didn't have enough to keep me. After a while they sent me to a hospital. A Romanian lady brought me home for a day, but she couldn't afford to keep me. Then my new parents came from America and adopted me. I felt nervous because I didn't know who they were until probably a month later, because I was only four and a half. They could only speak English and I could only speak Romanian.

### **Desi**

I had a stroke when I was six years old. I went to the doctor and got lots of shots and something happened with my blood vessels. I don't know what. I was in the hospital for three weeks. I couldn't move my right arm and I couldn't walk. I couldn't swallow and couldn't talk. My mother stayed with me in my room and at night she cried.

### **James**

I was in Mass General for five months. I couldn't walk; I couldn't talk. They fed me through tubes. And I couldn't use the bathroom, so they had a tube down there too. I had to go to Spaulding Rehab to learn how to walk.

**Selena**

When I was a baby I lived with my parents and my brothers, Omar and Ramon. My parents would go out and party and drink and leave us alone in the house for days, weeks, months, and we didn't get no food at all. It was three little bodies taking care of themselves. We would feed on anything, the walls, anything like that. That's how we got our food. My parents would leave us with strangers, people we didn't know. They never gave us care; they just left us like we were trash.

Sometimes they'd leave me with my grandmother, but she would beat me up and when she took me to the hospital she'd make excuses that I just ran into a door, or was playing in the apartment and fell down the stairs. And everybody knows that's not what happened. When I was two she beat me up real bad and left me in a coma. I don't remember much. All I know is that I was in a coma until I was three years old. But then I went into foster care and never saw my brothers again.

**James**

Going back to school after the accident was hard. All the kids knew me and I couldn't remember them. And the kids who'd been my friends before weren't any more because I was different.

**Irina**

My old school in the suburbs was really good, but they weren't specialized so they could never help me learn to read or do math. I could read the first letter of a word, but then I guessed at what it said. And I didn't want anyone to know that I couldn't tell time.

**Desi**

The stroke affects my memory. If you told me, "Desi, go to the store and go buy two cartons of milk, a thing of eggs, and some flour," I'd go to the store and I'd try to remember it. What did you want me to get? Eggs? Flour? I'm guessing orange juice? I wouldn't remember.

**James**

Everything was so hard it made me frustrated. I'd forgotten all the ways to do things. Just to get up and go to school, I had to do about a hundred things. It was hard to remember it all. Sometimes I'd end up standing in the shower for an hour.

**Selena**

I had a lot of problems in school. I wouldn't do my homework. I got detention a lot. I would lie a lot. I didn't have a lot of friends.

**James**

I was cockeyed and everyone would pick on me about that. I would get so mad so I would punch them, and then we'd get into a fight. I was always getting in trouble.

**Selena**

When I went to middle school the other kids would make fun of me for having seizures. They would imitate me shaking and my eyes rolling back into my head.

**Irina**

I was on the track team at my old school because I was a good runner. But none of the other girls paid any attention to me. They acted like I wasn't there, like I was invisible.

**Desi**

When the teacher talked in class it was hard for me to pay attention to what she was saying. I'd hear the first thing but while I was trying to understand that, she'd be on to something else and it would all roll into a big blur. Having to concentrate so hard made me extra tired. I would fall asleep all the time. I'd just put my head down on the desk and fall asleep.

**Selena**

When I was fifteen I was getting into gangs, fighting, smoking, drinking, partying, having sex. I was fighting with my foster family all the time. It would start with something small but then get out of control.

**James**

When I started doing worse in school, they shipped me to a new school for troubled kids. I was there for like two years. But I didn't really learn anything, and I was always causing trouble.

**Selena**

One time I was angry at my foster mother. I went into the bedroom I shared with my two sisters. There were three dressers against the wall. Mine was in the middle and there was one on each side. So I pushed all my sister's things to one side and everything of my other sister's to the other side. Everything was on the floor: jewelry, perfume all messed up - broken. The whole room was wrecked. They called the cops on me and took me to the hospital. I was there for six months.

**Irina**

My mom found out about Ivy Street on the Internet.

**Desi**

My parents and the school department finally decided that this is where I should go, because none of the other special ed programs had kids with brain injuries.

**James**

I went to court one day and they suggested this program, and at first I was like, "Okay. But I'll probably cause trouble there, too."

**Selena**

When I first came to Ivy Street, I was surprised because I didn't know they had jobs here, that you could work on vocational skills. That kind of motivated me. 'Cause I'm a very hard worker.

**Irina**

It's a school for kids like me. They never give up on me. They help me read, do math, help me with all the subjects. I try to sound out the words now. All day long in everything I do I'm learning to read.

**Desi**

The teachers taught me to make lists so I'd remember everything. And now I tell people to slow down and to tell me one thing at a time so I can keep it all straight. I don't doze off so much anymore 'cause I have better focus, and I don't have to concentrate so hard all the time.

**James**

I'm a lot more responsible since I've been at Ivy Street. At first I'd forget to make my bed and I'd say, "What's my chore again?" Now I made a book with pictures of everything I have to do. I look at it every day until it sinks in.

**Selena**

When I first came to Ivy Street I was reckless. I was hitting people and going out of control. Now that I look at myself three years later, I can see I've really changed. I'm not yelling at people. I can talk with them when I'm upset.

**Irina**

At the Ivy Street School the other kids don't make fun of you; they don't laugh in your face or talk behind your back. And you can be more yourself and not have to act like someone you're not.

**Desi**

Before I was in the Ivy Street School, I didn't talk that much. I guess I was mad. Mad at my life. But people look up to me here. People have my back.

**Irina**

I have a bunch of people I like at the School. I have my first best friend here. She trusts me and I trust her back.

**James**

At Ivy Street if we do something wrong we have to own up to it. We can't say, "But I have brain damage! It's not my fault." The staff won't give you a break. They'll say, "James you messed up—there are consequences." They try to teach us yeah, you're kids who have a brain injury but you're no different than any other kid out there. Like in normal life, if I'm over my meter on the parking, the police officer isn't going to say, "I didn't know you had a brain injury. Here you go, I'll rip it up." They're going to be like, "It doesn't matter; you're like everybody else. You're going to have to pay the ticket."

**Selena**

A trigger for me is when people yell, because it reminds me of home. Instead of losing control, I use my skills and take myself out of the situation. I go somewhere I can find peace and quiet. My time to focus; my time to feel calm and relaxed.

**James**

My job at Ivy Street is being a computer technician. I'm very good with computers, and one day I'm going to try to topple over Microsoft. I want to own my own computer company and raise a family.

**Desi**

I work for dining services at Boston University. Yeah, I like when I get that paycheck. Everybody loves that. Being an adult means paying your bills.

**Irina**

When I leave Ivy Street I want to go to Mass Bay Community College. I'll go there and get courses for being a teacher assistant in a day care center. I work two afternoons a week at a day care center now. And in the future I want to have a boyfriend and I'll have kids too.

**Selena**

Having a job has really helped. It's helped me to show my family that I'm doing better. To prove to people that I can do things. People have their pasts. But I can change.

**Desi**

My boss told me he thinks I'm worth as much as everyone else who works there. When he said that, I started doing things I didn't know I could. There's something in me that knows I'm gonna be someone special someday. I won't give up at all. I still strive to become somebody.

**James**

Ivy Street taught me that even though I have a brain injury I can live a normal life.

**Irina**

I'm not as frustrated about things now. It makes me happier; it makes my parents happier too.

**Selena**

Going here changed my life. I always wanted to be the person who would end up going to college, not someone who would be hanging around the streets doing nothing.

**Desi**

When I look in the mirror, I look at my hand and my leg I think, "Why did this have to happen to me? Why couldn't this have happened to somebody else?" I was this close to dying. But I'm still standing now.

**Selena**

I don't like giving up. I keep fighting, fighting, fighting until the end. Fight for what you need, fight for what you want. I want to show that people with brain injuries have good hopes for their life. 'Cause I do.