



I am a Team Player.

We are his advocate.



Transition Series Part 2: Life After High School | Internship

When Ben Merz was born, his first stop was the neonatal intensive care unit at Mercy Hospital in St. Louis. Ben was diagnosed with Down Syndrome and needed temporary support with breathing and feeding, which he received thanks to an incredible team of NICU nurses. For 18 days Ben's parents, Amie and Tony, commuted from their home in Jefferson County to spend time at the hospital with their newborn son.

As Ben's mom, Amie, imagined her young son's future, a landmark moment took place on the hospital campus. "I remember distinctly sitting in the cafeteria at Mercy and people with disabilities were cleaning off the tables. It gave me such hope because I realized this could be us someday and it's all going to be okay." Almost 18 years later this impactful moment in the hospital would come full circle, thanks to Ben's determination and incredible team of caregivers.

Now in his last year at Grandview High School, Ben is working as an intern with the Pathway to Employment Program at Mercy Hospital Jefferson in preparation for his life after high school. As an intern, he's gaining firsthand experience in the kitchen preparing food, cleaning, and learning about nutrition. He's also improving the work skills that will benefit him throughout his life like punctuality, time management, socialization, communication, and being a team player in a professional environment. Ben's gaining more independence and preparing for an incredibly bright future.

Ben has the support and encouragement of his family and his community, but most importantly—he has confidence in himself. This was especially clear during his time as the devoted manager of Grandview High School's varsity basketball team. The team's Coach, Terry Edwards, recognized how much Ben loved the game. On Senior night, his team stopped the clock and welcomed Ben to suit up as a player. When passed the ball, [Ben sunk an effortless 3-point corner shot](#) and the gymnasium roared with applause as Ben beamed and high-fived his teammates. Ben's team player spirit shines brightly throughout all aspects of his life!

His family credits much of Ben's success to the collaborative approach they've taken with the Grandview School District, Jefferson County community resources like Developmental Disability Advocates (DD Advocates), and the Pathway to Employment Program at Mercy Hospital Jefferson. Ben's resources continuously work together to support his growth and ambitions. Even with a strong support team, the transition from high school to life after high school can feel like falling off a cliff for families like Ben's.

Having experts and specialists to turn to provides a great sense of reassurance to Ben's loved ones. "DD Advocates has been helpful in terms of resources for long-term planning. It's a great opportunity to help develop the plan and make it a successful plan. A realistic plan," said Ben's mom, Amie. Ben looks forward to achieving a variety of milestones in life, just like his older brother Lucas, who he looks up to so much. Amie is excited for what's to come, and recently said: "Ben has a lot of goals. He wants to go to college, he wants to get an apartment, he wants to have a job, pay his bills. I think all of that can happen."

