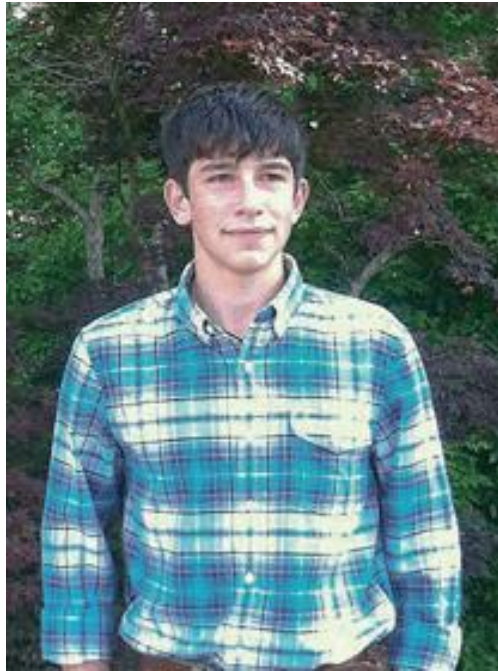




## New treatment helps teen make drastic transformation

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By



Austin McClellan has seen a dramatic transformation since working with Brain Balance.

By John Keuler

Metamorphosis is an extreme routine left solely to caterpillars that spend a period of a few weeks in a cocoon as they transform into a distinguishably different winged creature. It isn't often that a teenage boy undergoes modifications to the degree of a butterfly, outside of the normal maturation stage of puberty.

However, the changes that 15-year-old Austin McClellan experienced after being diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome three years ago fall just short of qualifying as metamorphosis without the chrysalis.

Walking with a slump and his eyes cast downward, Austin displayed symptoms that prompted his parents to have him tested in his home state of Alabama, where he was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome in 2010. As a 13 year old, Austin's left side of his brain tested at the level of a 15 year old while the right side was still working like an eight year old's, causing the Asperger's symptoms. The symptoms that led to the diagnosis included an inability to make decisions, a lack of concern for others' feelings, and a lack of spatial awareness, among other things typical of Asperger's, according to his mother Leslie.

The affliction made things that other people may do without a second thought a struggle for the family, in particular one family vacation. "We went to Colorado one time and we knew that we would have to buy him one-day passes all week," said Leslie. "He would pitch a fit but he didn't know how to communicate why he would pitch a fit. It may have been that he was too hot but he didn't know how to say that," she

continued.

Austin faced his greatest challenges in the social setting that he encountered most at that time, school. "I wasn't popular in sixth grade because I couldn't understand what people were saying. People used to make fun of me and I wouldn't even know it," Austin said.

In response to the diagnosis and the symptoms, the McClellans, Leslie and her husband Mike, did what they could to alleviate the struggle their son went through day in and day out with treatments and medications. Nothing stood out as incredibly successful out of all the remedies that they tried. Then, one day, Leslie came across *Disconnected Kids* and the Brain Balance Achievement Center in Peachtree City.

According to the Center Director at BBAC, Heather Lowenthal, *Disconnected Kids*, a book by BBAC's founder Dr. Robert Melillo, discusses the research behind the center. "Disconnected Kids talks about what goes on in the brain and what root causes there might be to the diagnoses. It also gives you an assessment that shows you where the weaknesses might be. And often times parents will read that and say that it described their children to a T," said Lowenthal.

Leslie and Mike were an example of one of those sets of parents and decided to arrange for Austin to begin treatment at the BBAC, nearly three hours away from their Alabama home. Enrolling in the first six-month term of treatment, Austin and Mike moved to the Peachtree City area from where Austin also attended Autumn's Nest, a home school program ran out of Fairburn.

During the 12 month long period of treatment, Austin worked three days a week for an hour, completing exercises to strengthen the right side of his brain, which had operated to the level that an eight year old's brain would function.

Physical training such as pushups and stretches were coupled with mathematical and reading comprehension practices to allow the unbalanced side of the brain to catch up to the advanced side. According to the BBAC, when one hemisphere of the brain is more advanced than the other it tends to dominate the processing of information and the information received by the senses does not get exchanged between the two halves properly, hindering the comprehension ability of the person.

In the beginning, Lowenthal said that Austin would struggle to get through his training because he had difficulty comprehending the directions and the activities would take much more time than they were intended to, but as he got better he progressed much more quickly.

After six months and at the end of the first round of treatment, Austin's right side of the brain had grown to work as efficiently as a 13 year old's. Although it was still not up to normal levels, it was proof that Austin's hard work was paying off and the McClellans decided to go ahead and begin a second six-month round of treatment, which allowed Austin to fully strengthen and balance his brain to the degree where it should be.

The development that he achieved was astounding. Living in Peachtree City, Austin's growth allowed him to join Boy Scout Troop 175 and the rock climbing club, Ascension. The symptoms that his family had become so accustomed to seeing were now nonexistent. "His spatial awareness problem was where I would be on the couch and he would always kick me as he walked by. When he came back he would walk by and I would flinch anyways," said his younger sister Grace, who is 12.

These days Austin attends a public high school in Alabama where he takes AP classes, runs cross country, and makes honor roll. "It is almost a God-given miracle from where he was in sixth grade to where he was in ninth grade," said Leslie.

The doctor who initially diagnosed Austin agreed. The McClellans said that when they brought him back for a final examination the doctor said that in his 40 years of experience he had never seen someone change so drastically. It was almost as if they had brought in a different person.

Approaching driving age, Austin hopes to split the cost of a truck with money he earns from working on his neighbor's farm. He understands how far he has come when he thinks about what driving would be like with Asperger's. "With spatial awareness it would be too confusing. With the stress, I wouldn't be able to handle it and I would probably freak out and get into a crash," he said.

Understanding where he has come from is an aspect that Leslie and Mike enjoy in Austin. "That's what the coolest thing about Austin is. He knows what he was like and he can feel the change. He is able to see things differently, feel things differently, and understand the unseen," said Leslie.

Mike shares her joy, "He can recognize the difference. That's the beauty of it is to watch him grow. It was weird to watch this 5' 10" boy ask questions like a 7-year-old," Mike said.

The family gladly attributes the success to Brain Balance, describing the 10 years prior to their discovery of BBAC as a battle. Austin's story gives hope to children who struggle with similar disorders such as autism, ADHD, ADD, Tourettes, bipolar disorder, dyslexia, and other learning disabilities as well.

With the help of BBAC, Austin has shed his cocoon that held him trapped inside for so long. He has emerged from it a new person, one that his mother saw inside of him the whole time. "I knew he was there. I always saw him in there. I felt that he would be unzipped. He would get unzipped and he would walk out," said Leslie.

Austin has walked out, and those strides he took were different than any other steps he had taken before. He now walks tall, and confidently looks into people's eyes, no longer trapped by Asperger's. Austin McClellan was trapped and now he is free.