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BRIAN & DAVID

Bolder Impact Story



Brian & David at their graduation ceremony, Aug. 2020

A shared enthusiasm for Puerto Rican pool (table) games isn't what initially drew David and Brian together; that was a bonus activity they discovered along the way while getting to know each other as well as they do today. Brian was inspired to pursue mentorship with Bolder Options when he heard Darrell Thompson, Bolder Options President, talking about the program on the radio. As Brian described it, "I had reached the place in my life where I finally felt I had the time for something I'd wanted to do for a while – volunteer with a mentoring program. Darrell's excitement really resonated with me – rewarding relationships, growth experiences (of both mentors and mentees), and the focus on health and learning together."

David is actually an exceptionally shy person. He was encouraged by a teacher to explore Bolder Options early in 8th grade. "I'm a quiet guy, pretty shy," David said softly, "Brian was cool with that." So, Brian did most of the talking while he and David embarked on more physical activities, like jogging, at first. "I'm a naturally curious person, but I learned quickly to ask fewer questions and practice patience," explained Brian. "One of so many things David has taught me!"

The pair met in September 2019, and graduated together this August.

It wasn't long before David said more, bit-by-bit, and not just with Brian. "Brian didn't always expect me to tell him stuff but always listened when I did. That helped me be able to talk more with other people, more than before anyway." Meanwhile, Brian was surprised by how much he learned "through David's lens, seeing the world around us as a shy young man who is really filled with so many thoughts unspoken," according to Brian.

Beyond words, "I learned that I could push myself more than I thought," David said. He and Brian joined the YMCA, where David set – and is achieving – some aggressive weightlifting goals – particularly in the bench press where David continued to exceed the goals set as he became stronger. They also completed the Resilinator adventure race and David's first running race, the Turkey Trot 5k, last fall. "I even learned how to ice skate," declared David, with pride. "I never thought I'd do that, or have so much fun outside in the winter, snowshoeing too!" Brian is impressed by how much David's confidence has expanded over the past year as he stretched to try more activities and excel at the same time. "I'm so proud of David and his growth over the past year."

In addition to regular meet-ups at the Y and training together, the pair participated in many of the weekly activities offered at Bolder Options. "This is a really supportive program," said Brian. "It's an incredible staff, we met a great community of other mentors and youth, and it wasn't all on me to create meaningful experiences with David."

Of course, the coronavirus pandemic shifted their playbook this spring, but they adjusted and remained in close contact. "We met outdoors, in parks and going running, and more often as it warmed up" noted Brian. They also connected remotely, checking in and talking about how David was doing in school. The Bolder virtual events helped them stay connected as well. "I was still able to talk with him whenever I wanted, and we did a lot more texting," laughed David. As for Brian, "Thanks to David, I realized I had become a better listener when we were challenged to stay connected by electronic communications."

And about those Puerto Rican pool table games? "They're a variation on the traditional eight-ball game, with more Puerto Rican variations we came up with together with the Bolder Options team, some of whom are Puerto Rican," explained Brian. "Yeah," laughed David, "we've had some good fun a lot of laughs playing pool at the Bolder house."