

# ***He Held People Up: Ian's Legacy Bridging Gaps to Mental Wellness. Be Better;***



Ian loved the water since he was about 18 months old. This picture is of him being held up in the water by his sister Chelsea because he couldn't quite swim yet. Surprisingly, after his passing, she told us that actually he was holding her up. We were so surprised. He was so young. He couldn't even swim yet. Wasn't he the one that needed help? Looking back, this is Ian's life in four words:

## ***He held people up***

- We have countless examples when Ian held others up. We had a large tree hit and destroy part of our house when Ian was 7 years old. His room took the brunt of the damage. Still, he comforted me, his mom, who was struggling with the damage. **He held me up.**
- When a friend or family member felt bad about something, he would listen and then try to help and distract them from their worries with humor. **He held them up.**
- When someone in his class in 11th grade was sitting alone, he left his friend group and spent the class working with her. **He held her up.**
- When someone didn't have money in their account to pay for groceries, Ian paid and took care of the issue for them. **He held them up.**
- When teammates were struggling with depression and anxiety, he told them he understood and gave them the validation they needed. **He held them up.**
- When a teammate was being treated unfairly, he called others out on it and challenged them to be better. **He held that teammate up.**

## **Ian Needed To Be Held Up Too. He Needed:**

- To have options for care between appointments
- To know that when treatment wasn't working, it wasn't his fault
- To have his family and support network educated and supported
- To have someone for the long haul who he could trust, who always had his back, was an expert in care, and was looking out for him and his family
- Examples of survivors from mental illness that understood his pain and could be a role model
- Options besides the Emergency Room for same day treatment
- A peer support group that met regularly and he was able to get into
- To tell someone he had suicidal ideation and to know others feel the same
- To learn at an early age how to express what he was feeling without fear

## **We Needed:**

- FOLLOW UP from the health care system
- Family support and therapy
- No insurance loopholes and to know that there are “tricks” to get care
- Transparency in care
- Action based education
- Not to be judged or invalidated because Ian was able to function as a student and high level athlete
- The tools and words to work with Ian on a daily basis
- A place to go when we had questions and concerns right away-NOT THE INTERNET
- Someone to guide us with NO HANDOFFS
- Someone to always be there with us during this painful journey
- Consistent and compassionate care
- Not to automatically be expected to be experts in Mental Illness and systems of care
- Someone to take the time to really help us

Ian was a fighter. We called him a warrior. He got up every day and battled his illness in order to live an ordinary life. He learned at an early age with hard work and determination that he could reach his goals. He truly believed that hard work paid off-it always had. He was a good student and a Division I collegiate athlete all while suffering from unimaginable pain from his illness.

This is common among student-athletes who are programmed from a young age to portray a strong exterior even when things are not going well. “Ever since they were six or seven years old they have this fighter mentality,...they are to fight through whatever they need to fight through. Sometimes it’s some sort of mental illness and they need to stop and address it” (Tuesday, T.L., 2020).

He stopped and addressed it, but it wasn’t enough. There are gaps in treatment. **Be Better; will bridge those gaps.**

## **Why the turtle?**

Since Ian was a little kid, he loved anything to do with the water, the ocean, sharks, and especially turtles. He had a pet turtle, Oscar, and his dream was to save sea turtles. When we were on our last family vacation in Hawaii, Ian finally got to snorkel with them. He would lose himself for hours. The picture of the turtle that we have on our website and much of our media was taken by Ian on that trip. It reminds us of the time we all had together.





- Our name, Be Better;, comes from a eulogy that Ian’s Uncle Brian gave. Brian’s wife, Liz, designed the turtle logo for a tattoo just after Ian’s passing. That design and Brian’s words were so special to us, that we wanted them to be a part of Ian’s legacy. Brian was such a huge part of Ian’s life, using his words and Liz’s art seemed perfect. The semicolon comes from the tattoo that Ian had on his wrist. “It is a sign of solidarity and strength in the face of suicide, depression, and other mental health issues.
- For those who have gone through it, it is a reminder of how far they have come” (Roden, 2021).

**Be Better; Mission and Vision**

*Mission: Be Better; walks alongside athletes, systems of care, families, and individuals to improve mental wellness and address mental illness and suicidality.*

*Vision: The Ian Miskelley Be Better; Wellness Center bridges the gaps to mental wellness by walking alongside families and individuals, creating a community, and providing support, education, and guidance that is relationship focused and compassionate.*

After working for a few months, we determined that we could immediately hold others up by providing support, consultations, and education so that they had the tools to bridge the current gaps in care. Once we determined our Mission and Vision, we started thinking about our message and trying to focus on what we think the community needs and which gaps we want to fill, we found this about sea turtles:

...thought to live between 60 and 80 years, the Honu is a symbol of longevity, safety, and mana (spiritual energy) in Hawaiian culture and their presence brings good luck and peace. The Honu is considered a form of ‘aumakua or ancestral spirit offering **lifelong protection, wisdom and guidance.** (The Hawaiian Honu, 2021)

We were pretty taken back about the last sentence because we had already determined with our Board that supporting, educating, and navigating (S.E.N.) are the three pillars of Be Better;.

**Support (Lifelong Protection)  
 Educate (Wisdom)  
 Navigate (Guidance)**

The Be Better; logo designed by Liz Galindolf was roughly based on the Honu turtle; we couldn't believe how everything was coming together. We are striving to **Be Better**; to make Ian's memory live on and continue what he was working towards.

### References

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