

A Letter from an ERA Graduate

September 1, 2012

Dear Parents,

In December of 2011, my mom decided to enroll me in the program at Eagle Ranch Academy. I know that choosing to send your child to a treatment center is one of the most difficult things you'll ever have to do as a parent, so I'd like to do what I can to make the process somewhat easier. Hopefully, by hearing this from me directly, you'll further understand how ERA can transform your child's life for the better.

I was seventeen years old when I was sent to Eagle Ranch Academy. My mom, like many other parents of troubled teens, knew I was spiraling out of control. She feared for my safety on a daily basis, not knowing what kind of trouble I was going to get myself into. There were many nights she worried tirelessly, having no idea where I was or when I would come home. She watched as her beautiful, happy little girl turned into a sick, miserable person who had absolutely no sense of self-worth or appreciation for anything.

My downward spiral began at age thirteen, shortly after my parents' divorce. As I grew older, I became more and more volatile. Everything about my life was unstable. I fought with my mom constantly. I began experimenting with drugs & alcohol, which soon became a habit. My days lacked any kind of regimen; I hardly slept, I ate whenever I felt like it, I exercised infrequently. I found myself unable to hold a healthy relationship for long period of time. At seventeen, my life rapidly fell apart. I went to school sporadically and my grades were slipping. I was never home and I didn't care if I was worrying anyone. I was depressed, lonely, apathetic, selfish, impulsive, lost. I didn't realize how quickly my life was deteriorating and how severely I was impacting the people around me.

My mom began feeling hopeless when none of her efforts seemed to have any lasting effect on me. She hoped and prayed that somehow, I would pull through. By some immaculate miracle, my mom found the ERA website and began looking into the program. She was impressed with the information she gathered, but what really appealed to her about Eagle Ranch Academy was much more. There was an exuberant sense of security she felt from ERA that was without parallel to that of any of the other facilities she had researched. My mom found it effortless to place her trust in the process, even though she was unsure of what the outcome would be like. She had a feeling that Eagle Ranch Academy had the ability to save my life, and she was right.

Now, my world has changed completely. My mom and I have an excellent relationship, and mutual respect for each other. I am a high school graduate. I have been sober for nine months. I have lost over 50 lbs due to exercise and change in diet. I know how to form healthy relationships and have gained lifelong friends. I have learned positive coping skills, and know how to apply them in real-life situations. I am days away from graduating from Eagle Ranch Academy. More importantly than anything else; I am happy. I have forgiven myself for my mistakes, and I no longer let my past affect the person I want to become. I am confident, I am sincere, and I am driven. The best part of it all is that I did it myself; Eagle Ranch Academy was just there to guide me through the process.

At the end of the program, students choose a service project to take on, which allows them to give back to the community in some way. Writing this letter is part of what I have chosen to do for my own service project, in the hopes that I can help you and your family in some way.

I can imagine that as a parent, you have many questions about the program, so I'll do my best to cover anything you might be wondering about:

Students at ERA abide by a weekly schedule, which incorporates structure and variety into the program. We have certain periods everyday, including: time to work on our packets and talk to staff members on a one-on-one basis, PE activities outside, and groups when we have the opportunity to express or talk about highlights of the day. There are other periods that we have various times throughout the week, such as: use of the Rec Room, free time to relax or socialize, time to do an activity as a family, and more. The schedule is reasonably balanced between structured time and leisure time, which helps establish an understanding of moderation.

Schooling may be a concern considering your son or daughter may have been doing poorly or avoiding school altogether. Your child will be able to receive school credits while at ERA by taking online courses. We have school for certain blocks in our daily schedule, but never for a long period of time. This makes it easier to find motivation and stay focused. Also, progressing in school is necessary in order to progress in the program, so kids use that as an incentive to move forward. There are many tutors available to help your child as well.

Because of the way your child is acting, you may be afraid that they will never forgive you for sending them away. In my observations, he or she will be angry for the first week or two of being at ERA. Once your child starts becoming acquainted with the program and realizes how greatly his or her life can improve, they will understand that being at ERA is an opportunity rather than a punishment.

Actually getting your child to Eagle Ranch Academy might be a struggle, but don't let that stop you from going through with the process. Bringing your child here on your own is the best method of transportation. If not, it is important you get your son or daughter here any way possible. Don't let this make you feel guilty. What matters in the end is that your child gets to Eagle Ranch Academy. Remember that this is what your child needs, and it's for the best.

Eagle Ranch Academy provides an extremely safe and comforting environment, which will help put your child at ease as he or she goes through the program. The staff members are caring and supportive; there is always someone available and willing to talk at any hour of the day or night. I have received constant help throughout my time at ERA, which is a journey I wouldn't have completed successfully on my own.

This process is healing for you just as much as it is for your child. The program at Eagle Ranch Academy incorporates parents by emphasizing the need for a healthy and stable home environment. You will keep in contact with your child's therapist, and he or she will be able to provide you with updates on your son or daughter's progress. Your child's therapist will also schedule weekly therapy sessions for you and your child, so you can have a first-hand experience of the changes he or she is making. Your child won't become a changed person overnight; don't let this discourage you at the beginning of the process.



Tess and Mom

Service Project 9/11/12

It wouldn't be possible for me to explain to you exactly what it is about this program that makes it work. For me, what helped the most was the change in lifestyle. I have found that my physical health and emotional health are directly related. Eating three scheduled meals, getting about nine hours of sleep every night and exercising daily all contributed to my overall happiness. This environment is ideal for finding and regulating the right balance of medications for your child, if you choose. My moods before were irrational and unpredictable; I now am much calmer and more stable. Because I have learned the importance of having a regular routine here, I am ready and willing to apply these skills to my life at home.

If you're skeptical to believe in the powerful impact of this program, the proof is in my story. On April 23, 2012, I turned eighteen years old. At that point, I had not yet graduated from high school. As a legal adult, I am able to sign myself out and leave if I chose to do so. Even after graduating from high school, I am still here, for no purpose other than to finish the program. I am an avid believer in the beauty of this process. I won't leave until my picture hangs among those of other graduates and my handprints rest on the wall, where they will remain forever. ERA changed me from a quitter to an achiever, a slacker to a leader, a skeptic to a believer. I recognize my life as something so beautiful and valuable, because I love who I am and the person I've become.

Sending your child to Eagle Ranch Academy will bring back the light in your son's eyes, the talents in your daughter's soul, and the peace in your family's home. The love and gratitude that your child will show you will impress you beyond belief. I hope you believe that these changes are possible for your child too.

Sincerely,

Tess

ERA graduate October 19, 2012



12/18/11
(Date enrolled)

7/28/12
(HS Grad)

10/19/12
(ERA Program Grad)

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