

# Endorsements

## Received During Benjamin's Debut Year of Public Speaking (2012)

Benjamin's presentation was the best-attended event that Psi Chi has sponsored in the last ten years; all the seats in the 135-chair room were filled, people sat in the aisles, stood in the rear of the room, and poured out of the doors. Benjamin did not disappoint. He gave a primer on autism that was not only fact-based but also gave insight into what it is like to be autistic. He cogently answered any and all questions that the audience asked. Although most 17-year-olds would be extremely intimidated lecturing to an audience consisting mostly of college students, Benjamin showed no anxiety and left the students entranced. He has, for these students, become a powerful spokesperson for a compassionate perspective on autism. Benjamin's effect on the students has not been short lived. Since his presentation, students in my classes have asked to discuss autism, and some students have talked to me one-on-one about Benjamin's performance; one young woman spoke with me for an hour about her now-broadened view of the capabilities of people with autism. In sum, Benjamin is an amazing young man, a wonderful representative for autism and, I believe, ideally suited to receive the "Yes I Can" award.

*Dr. Joseph Berta, Professor of Psychology, University of Colorado, Boulder*

As a student at Fairview, Benjamin has a way of attracting other students to him. He has a heart of gold and a personality that is unforgettable. Benjamin is not afraid to answer any questions that students ask him, and is always glad to do so. Throughout the school year, you can find Benjamin doing many projects around the school to make a difference. This is simply his nature; he loves his school and his classmates. When Benjamin gave his presentation to an audience of over 100 students, teachers, and community members, he had them all in the palm of his hand. His genuine presentation incorporates humor, visuals, and interaction with his audience. Benjamin's presentation has helped many of our students understand autism. They stated over and over how they appreciate Benjamin's courage to speak with them.

*Ross Sutter, Assistant Principal, Fairview High School*

Benjamin's talk needs to be seen by many more people than just the 100 or so who were lucky enough witness this remarkable young man and to hear about his struggle to overcome autism-generated problems. He could become a national spokesperson and inspiration for the thousands of young people who work so hard at overcoming this issue. Benjamin has "one of God's greater angels" as a mom. Malva, your story might be as important as Benjamin's for others to hear.

*Perry Conway, creator & producer of educational Aerie Nature Series*

I wanted to tell you (Malva) how inspiring you and Benjamin are. Your hard work and dedication to your son is one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen. It is INCREDIBLE! And Benjamin...there aren't even words to describe how inspiring he is. I could not stop smiling during his entire presentation; I am just in awe of his talents. He is such a glowing person and his smile made everyone in the room happy! I just want you to know how much I really appreciate what you two are doing with his presentations. I think they are wonderful and he will go very far with this. I have always had a very special place in my heart for children with autism, and that is why I am dedicating my career to working with them. I want to see more kids like Benjamin! It takes love like yours to do that, and I hope that someday I will be able to help kids grow the way you have helped your son.

*Madisen Haner, psychology student at University of Colorado, Boulder*

What an amazing team you two have been. Inspiring presentation all the way through. Benjamin, I think you put your listeners to the task of improving themselves through a focused and intentional effort. How often does that happen!? Simply amazing. Thanks for uplifting me and everyone else.

*Stephen Morrissey, CEO of Plantiva*

I am very grateful to you (Malva) for having let me know about today's talk. It was deeply moving, beautifully organized and presented. And so helpful to others, as exemplified by the mother whose difficult daughter may now get help... thanks to you.

*Ingrid Fotino, Ph.D. in Mathematics*

I've known Benjamin and his mom for nearly a decade and have witnessed Benjamin's growth from a boy highly impacted by autism to a young man engaged with others and with many interests and passions. I remember watching him in elementary-school plays where I could see the beginnings of the dynamic actor he has now become, along with being a loving, kind and thoughtful person. Benjamin brings diligence, humor and honesty to his roles in the theater and to his powerful presentation about living with autism. I am honored to know Benjamin and his family and I know that his future will be authentically Benjamin.

*Anna Stewart, BVSD parent liaison & SEAC Coordinator*

It is an honor for me to recommend Benjamin Tarasewicz for the "Yes I Can" award. Benjamin has achieved so much in his young life. His hard work to overcome the communication aspects of having autism has paid off for him. He delivered a very touching presentation to a staff of sixty-five (at the Colorado Department of Education in Denver) and did so with poise and humor. He continues to tell his personal story to people across Colorado to help break down barriers and give people a better understanding of what it means to live with autism. He would represent the "Yes I Can" award well.

*Peg Brown-Clark, M.Ed., Assistant Commissioner, Exceptional Student Services Unit, CO. Dept. of Ed.*