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Central College assists boy with an alcoholic mother pass the SAT

Sitting on the couch watching his mother in the kitchen take sip after sip of alcohol straight from the bottle. Zach Pennington tries to ignore her as he studies for his upcoming SAT exam. The 18-year old Cleveland High School senior is used to this life. His mother has been an alcoholic ever since his father died eight years ago. When Zach was 10 years old his father was shot while sitting on their front porch. Zach was only in fifth grade and his life took a dramatic turn. He started acting out in school, bullying other students, and he barely made it through middle school.

Now as a high school senior Zach has begun to pull his life together. "One day it just clicked. This is my life, I have to stop living in the past and move on. Even though I will never forget what happened that day to my Father, I need to stop being so angry at the world and instead make my dad proud." This is when Zach was chosen by his high school to participate in Central College's online "Early Support" program. The program offers writing and computer skill classes to high school seniors who placed below average on a sample SAT test. "I was in a bad place when Jim, the high school counselor told me about the online program. I was finally excited to learn because I was going to receive the help I needed to pass the SAT."

Zach started staying after school every other day to participate in the online

“Early Support” program that was transmitted to the interactive high schools. One thing that is really good about this program is that professors and students are required to communicate online regularly. “Zach started out being shy to the program, he didn’t participate much in the online discussions. Then I emailed him and asked him to participate more and he did. It was like all he needed was that extra push to do well,” said professor Wilkes who teaches the online writing course for the program.

Zach says it was hard for him to stay positive when he would have to go home and see his mother’s life going down the drain. “Sometimes when I would get home at 4 p.m. after class my mom would already be so drunk she couldn’t get off the couch. She would yell at me to get her another beer or fill up her glass, if I didn’t do what she wanted she would throw the closes thing to her towards my head.”

Throughout the program Zach stayed strong despite his tough situation at home. He stayed with it and was able to finally take the SAT exam with confidence at the end of the “Early Support” program. Zach was one of students in the program who increased his SAT score over 200 points. “I was so excited when I got my scores back. The first thing I did was run right into Jim’s office and thanked him for helping me turn my life around.”

Zach applied to Central College and was one of 85 seniors in the program to be accepted by an institution participating in the program. “To think even last year I was doubtful that I would go to college. Now it’s happening. I never thought this would happen to me. I mean kids like me don’t go to college. I just know that my dad is up in heaven smiling down on me and I am proud to be his son.”