

## Who Will Help My Child? A Mother's Story

When Karen Story drove her teenage son Derek to Solstice House, it was the last mile on a very long journey.

Derek had just been discharged from an inpatient psychiatric facility, after being treated for bipolar disorder. For 15 years, Karen had been searching for help for her child.

Before his latest discharge, Derek lived at home and attended an alternative day-school located over a half-hour from the family's North Shore home. And before that, Derek struggled within his local public school system.

Derek began to show signs of early onset bipolar disorder at seven years old, when the symptoms were triggered by a medication for childhood asthma.

Throughout his childhood, in addition to his diagnosed mental health condition, Karen had a hunch that something else wasn't quite right with her son.

As Derek entered his teen years, his behavior turned more threatening and violent. "I always slept on high alert, always listening for another episode," Karen says. She also feared for her own safety and the safety of her other children.

### Searching for Care: "The Longest Battle of my Life"

Over the years, doctors, teachers and therapists offered treatments, medications and referrals. But it was difficult for anyone outside of the family to fully understand Derek's condition. For one thing, doctors said that he didn't present as "typical" bipolar. And at school, Derek didn't display the same violence as he did with his family at home.

One day during a parent-teacher consultation, there was a fractious episode when teachers and counselors witnessed Derek trying to break a school window with a chair.

Eventually, a crisis team found Derek a bed in the inpatient psychiatric unit, where he stayed all summer.

During that time, Karen watched her son gain an alarming amount of weight. He grew increasingly sad and scared. September came, and the insurance coverage was due to end. It was time for Derek to be sent home.

The day before Derek's discharge, Karen was at work. She was exhausted. Afraid. Out of options. She shut her eyes and prayed to the universe for help, "for someplace where my child could find peace within himself."

Her cell phone rang. It was her son's discharge nurse. The nurse said: "There's this program in Rowley called Solstice."

After the intake, Karen Story drove north to the home and school where she dropped off her son and crossed her fingers that, this time, things might change.

In Solstice's communal dining room, Derek began to learn how to share meals with the other teenage residents. In this social setting, Solstice staff noticed that he had occasional auditory and visual hallucinations. His medication regime was reviewed and adjusted. Things began to look better.

Derek began to stabilize. But like Karen, the clinical staff at Solstice felt that something else just wasn't right.

Karen consented to the staff's referral to a pediatric endocrinologist, who diagnosed Derek with Klinefelter Syndrome, a treatable chromosomal condition.

Once he began treatment for this condition, Derek's physical health stabilized and his mental health symptoms became more manageable. "For 15 years I had been trying to find an answer to why my child was this way," Karen says.

### Final Stop: Graduation Day

Last summer, Karen Story was among the proud parents who watched her son graduate from the Solstice School.

Says Karen: "Bit by bit, one little piece at a time, the Solstice staff kept digging until they found what was right for my son. They put him back together, whole and happy."



*This summer, Karen Story attended her son's graduation from the Solstice Program.*