



Meet Ayden

A couple of years ago, Ayden defined himself as one thing: a football player. To him, life revolved around football. So, when he fractured his spine, life as he knew it ended.

Not only could Ayden no longer play football, he couldn't go to school, hang out with friends, or do much of anything else and he became withdrawn, lonely, and depressed. During that time, his mom experienced a health scare, which only worsened Ayden's depression. He felt like he had hit rock bottom.

When Ayden finally got the doctor's OK to resume school and activities, he was determined to turn things around. With a little help from a United Way program, he did.

Still wearing a neck brace, Ayden returned to his old after-school program and got involved in everything he could. He would sweep the hallways, help out in the office, and assist with the younger kids.

The support and encouragement he got there motivated him to do even more. He began volunteering with a food pantry and got involved with the program's student council. And with help from caring mentors and the program itself, Ayden began taking on leadership roles. He became president of the program's student council and now oversees the food pantry.

He has learned how to be a leader, how to persevere through tough times, and how important it is to give back – even when you don't think you have much to give.

These days, Ayden's injury has healed and he is able to play football again, but football no longer defines Ayden. Now Ayden defines himself as a friend, a son, a volunteer, a leader, a mentor, and someone who plays football.