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## Working toward a dream

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 by Colleen Donald  
Project PATCH coordinator

8/25/2009 - **BOISE, Idaho** -- Roger's\* parents weren't bad people by nature, but each had been taught anger and violence from their own childhoods. Roger's parents were survivors, however. They each graduated high school and entered the military as a step in achieving success. After meeting in the Air Force, the couple married and lived out their dreams. Both then successfully completed their military duties and concentrated on being a family.

Roger was their first child. His parents were excited about their newborn, but Roger's mom still wished for a little girl to love and hold. Still, she nurtured Roger and did her best to be a good parent. Roger's little sister, Jasmine, came along two years later. It was an especially exciting time for the family. They had a sense of completeness with their two precious children. They had times of family games and vacations. Roger developed his own dream of someday following in his parents footsteps by joining the Air Force. He'd grown up hearing and respecting the stories of their military days and wanted that same joy and sense of accomplishment for himself.

As the years passed, Roger's family became chaotic and filled with conflict. Roger's dad, wounded by situations in his own childhood, had a short temper and would sometimes lash out when angry. As a result, Roger saw his dad as unapproachable and often avoided him. Roger's mom became a yo-yo of emotions. She wavered between wanting Roger near her, while at the next moment violently rejecting him. Yet, while she pushed Roger away, she always kept Jasmine close. This left Roger longing even more for his mother's love. He blamed himself for not being good enough to deserve it.

With so much against them, the family split up. Roger struggled in all areas of his life. He was failing school, he was getting into trouble around the neighborhood, and he simply wouldn't listen at home. The family learned about Project PATCH, a residential treatment facility just north of Boise in Garden Valley, Idaho. They felt they had to take action to help Roger and break the family cycle of dysfunction.

When Roger first entered the PATCH program, he was a mess. He attempted to run away on two occasions. He used defiance and self-harm as a way to mask any pain he was feeling. In addition, Roger put up an emotional wall between him and all the other children and staff members. He was a hurting and lost boy. Roger had given up on all of his dreams in life.

It was a long journey for Roger as he hung onto his stubbornness and lethargic spirit. But finally, Roger is dreaming again. He has made many friends at Project PATCH. He's talking to his counselor about hurts from the past and he is also able to look back at the good moments he had with his family as a way to build hope for his own future.

"We've seen Roger do some pretty scary stuff trying to run from his issues," said Dustin Young, Roger's counselor. "But now he's learned to express his feelings and handle them appropriately - not pretend they don't exist. He can also look outside himself and has empathy for the feelings of others."

Roger talks often about the Air Force now. His dream has been rekindled as he remembers the exciting stories his parents shared with him about their lives in the Air Force. His schoolwork has improved now that he has a purpose. He believes enough in himself to feel he can be the fighter pilot he's always wanted to be.

It's getting close to the time for Roger to leave Project PATCH and return home. He and his family have worked hard on the issues that led him here and Roger's smile has reappeared as joy re-enters his life.

"Roger has come so far," said his dad. "He's struggled a lot with avoiding issues and running away from problems. This separation with him being at PATCH is hard, but I can see him changing and I know it's worth it. I have high expectations for when he comes home and we can be a family again."

Living as he was, Roger never would have been able to get on the right track to follow his Air Force dreams. Life is different now, however.

"I've learned so much here about being real," said Roger. "My buddies Dillon and Alex spent time talking over things with me everyday. They really encouraged me to keep trying. One thing I believe now is don't ever give up, no matter what."

\*Roger is not his real name

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