

Northern Colorado burn patient says thanks with electronic tablets

Donation will benefit Western States Burn Center patients



Ben Helzer, a former patient at Western States Burn Center at North Colorado Medical Center, hugs Meghan Hoyle, his occupational therapist.

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“ Seeing you happy with your family is the best thank-you for us. ”

GREELEY, Colo. (Aug. 19, 2019) – By donating 60 electronic writing pads to North Colorado Medical Center’s Western States Burn Center, Greeley resident Ben Helzer communicated a heartfelt message: Thank you.

Ben, 38, visited the burn center last month with his family to deliver the gifts and reconnect with staff who took care of him. In 2015, Ben suffered burns on over 40 percent of his body and inhalation burns following an industrial accident. He was hospitalized at NCMC for four weeks, and then spent three more weeks in a rehabilitation hospital in Loveland.

Throughout his recovery, which is ongoing, Ben has endured skin grafts, rehab, surgeries and setbacks. To date he has had over 30 medical procedures.

Also, the inhalation injuries meant Ben needed a tracheotomy – an incision in the windpipe – to allow him to breathe. Complications with this caused him to lose his voice for 14 months and to need multiple complicated surgeries to repair the damage. Ben met with a world-leading airway specialist at the University of Cincinnati Medical Center for surgery to repair his larynx. He spent two years traveling to Cincinnati, to have his airway rebuilt by a team of specialists.

At the start of 2019, much of the wounds to Ben’s body had healed, but the airway opening remained. After having the trach removed, the hole was scarred open and prevented Ben from being able to do things he enjoyed including swimming and talking normally. That changed in May 2019 when the tracheotomy hole was closed through another surgery that removed his scar tissue sealing the area and giving him back his voice. While Ben has made great strides throughout his healing journey, the affects of his accident will be life-long.

“We’ve come full circle now,” said Ben’s father, Rich Helzer, to the group assembled in the burn center recently. “It’s all good.”

Ben’s mother, Kristi Helzer, said Greeley rallied around the family after the accident. At the time, Rich delayed retirement to help pay for Ben’s care, and Kristi became Ben’s full time caregiver. When donations came to help with costs, the family set them aside.

Now, it’s time to give back, Rich said. In addition to the 60 LCD Boogie Boards, the family gave three iPads and \$400 to be used for transfer sheets that help in moving patients..

The idea for the Boogie Boards came from Ben’s experience using one after his larynx surgery. The hospital staff in Cincinnati gave him a Boogie Board where he could write a message, push a button and the message would disappear so he could write something else.

The iPads and transfer sheets are needs they noticed when Ben was hospitalized.

“This is our thank-you to you,” Rich Helzer said.

Ben added that the compassionate care he received at NCMC sped up his healing process, and thinks very highly of the many members of the medical staff who helped him throughout his time in the Western States Burn Center.

“Seeing you happy with your family is the best thank-you for us,” said Banner Health burn surgeon Lyndsay Deeter, MD.

Photo cutlines: Ben Helzer, a former patient at Western States Burn Center at North Colorado Medical Center, hugs Meghan Hoyle, his occupational therapist.

Ben Helzer, and his wife, Annie DeJohn, speak to a group of caregivers at North Colorado Medical Center's Western States Burn Center.

Helzers donated 60 e-writing tablets called Boogie Boards to the hospital.

About Banner Health

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[Boogie Board](#)

(99 KB)

[Ben Helzer and wife Annie DeJohn thank the burn center staff.](#)

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