

Excellence in Service Award
Benjamin G. Elder
Licensed Nursing Assistant
Kendal at Hanover
Hanover, New Hampshire

Nominated by: Rebecca Smith, Chief Executive Officer, Kendal at Hanover

This Excellence in Service Award nomination is being submitted for Benjamin G. Elder, posthumously. Ben was 34 years old when he died on February 26, 2010. While Ben's death has been a terrible blow to the Kendal at Hanover (KaH) family, especially those who worked so closely with him, we all take comfort in knowing that his job at Kendal was one of the best things in his life. Ben took his own life after a long period of challenges, but during those struggles, he was always at work ready to provide loving care and service to our residents on our Skilled Nursing Unit.

Ben was a Licensed Nursing Assistant. He came to KaH in December 2002 and had just completed seven (7) years of service at the time of his death. Ben was a loving, caring, and compassionate LNA. The best way for me to describe why I believe Ben should receive this award is through the words of those who worked most closely with him and were such an important part of his life and his success as an LNA.

Ben's parents asked KaH's Director of Nursing, Laurie Flynn, to speak at his memorial service. I want to share some of the content of her beautiful eulogy. Laurie said that she had reviewed his performance evaluations in his file and that she was struck by what he recently said in his self assessment in response to the question, "What part of your job do you think you do best?" Ben responded by saying, "The way I interact with the residents. I am patient, I do best assisting people, I provide a compassionate, empathetic approach with our residents including assisting and comforting them when needed. I work cooperatively with others and maintain confidentiality."

Laurie went on to say the following..."First of all, I have to agree with Ben's self assessment. The way he was involved and interacted with residents was nothing short of a gift. Many of our residents have mid-to-late stage Alzheimer's disease and Ben spoke Alzheimer's! What I mean by that is a person with this disease has difficulty communicating. Often behavior symptoms appear in response to the stress of not being able to make their needs known. I have seen Ben through his calm, unobtrusive way, provide comfort and bring peace to a resident in distress. His quiet presence and ability to engage residents with soothing conversation, music, or an activity worked like magic to meet that resident's need at the time. He was kind and thoughtful. I saw Ben exit the room of a resident who was receiving end-of-life care. It was before the start of his shift on the nursing unit where he wasn't scheduled. He had picked a bouquet of wild flowers and left them for the resident. No one would have known had I not seen him at the time." The daughter of that resident to whom Ben brought the flowers was at the memorial service and spoke with Laurie afterwards. She told her that Ben was so wonderful to her mother during her end of life journey. Amazing how people have an impact!

Finally, Laurie closed her eulogy by saying..."I want to understand why Ben made such an impact on my life and reflect on what he taught me. I think that the most important gift Ben gave to me was his example. The opportunity to look closely at what he believed he did best. Those are the things I need to emulate...More...kindness, patience, and compassion. Ben, may you find those things in the arms of an angel."

Since Ben's death, our nurses and LNA's have been writing messages in a "Memories of Ben" book. This has helped them to work through their grief and to keep Ben's memory alive. We also plan to have a memorial service at Kendal and plant a tree in memory of him.

I have heard so many comments about Ben in the last couple of months. Staff members have said that Ben was always there to help out with anything that needed to be done, that he always thought about what was best for residents, and never felt that something was not his job. His caring for residents also was extended to staff. For example, Ben would wait in the parking lot at 11:00 p.m. end of shift, for all of the staff traveling north on Route 10 during stormy weather, to ensure all would be safe on the drive home. It has also been said that, in seven years, he only called out sick twice and, in fact, was more apt to appear on his scheduled days off. Knowing Ben, that was probably to be sure we were not short staffed and because he wanted to check on the residents that meant so much to him.

Ben was known for really focusing on what he needed to do for residents and never wanted to be distracted. One staff member wrote the following in the memory book..."I remember Ben was helping me get a resident ready for bed, but the TV was on. If you don't remember, this was very distracting for Ben. He wasn't able to focus until the TV was off. It was cute because the resident and her husband were giggling, but very cooperative in turning off the TV so Ben could focus."

It is difficult to express how many ways Ben Elder had an impact on residents and staff at KaH. He was an example of someone who believed in what he did, loved his work and those he worked with, and loved those residents he cared for. Whether it was bringing freshly picked wild flowers to a dying resident, helping out a team member, working extra shifts, or being sure the women he worked with got home safely, Ben gave his best to KaH for seven years. Ben was a true example of someone who believed in the Kendal System's *Values and Practices*. In carrying out our mission, our primary objective is to establish and maintain integrity and excellence in all aspects of our work. Ben was a shining example of this.

In submitting this award nomination, I asked myself the question, "If Ben was still alive, would I nominate him?" My answer was "yes." What makes this more meaningful, however, is the opportunity to recognize Ben in a way that he would have thought was too much. Because Ben was quiet and humble, he would never have thought that all of the wonderful things he did for our residents and staff deserved recognition.