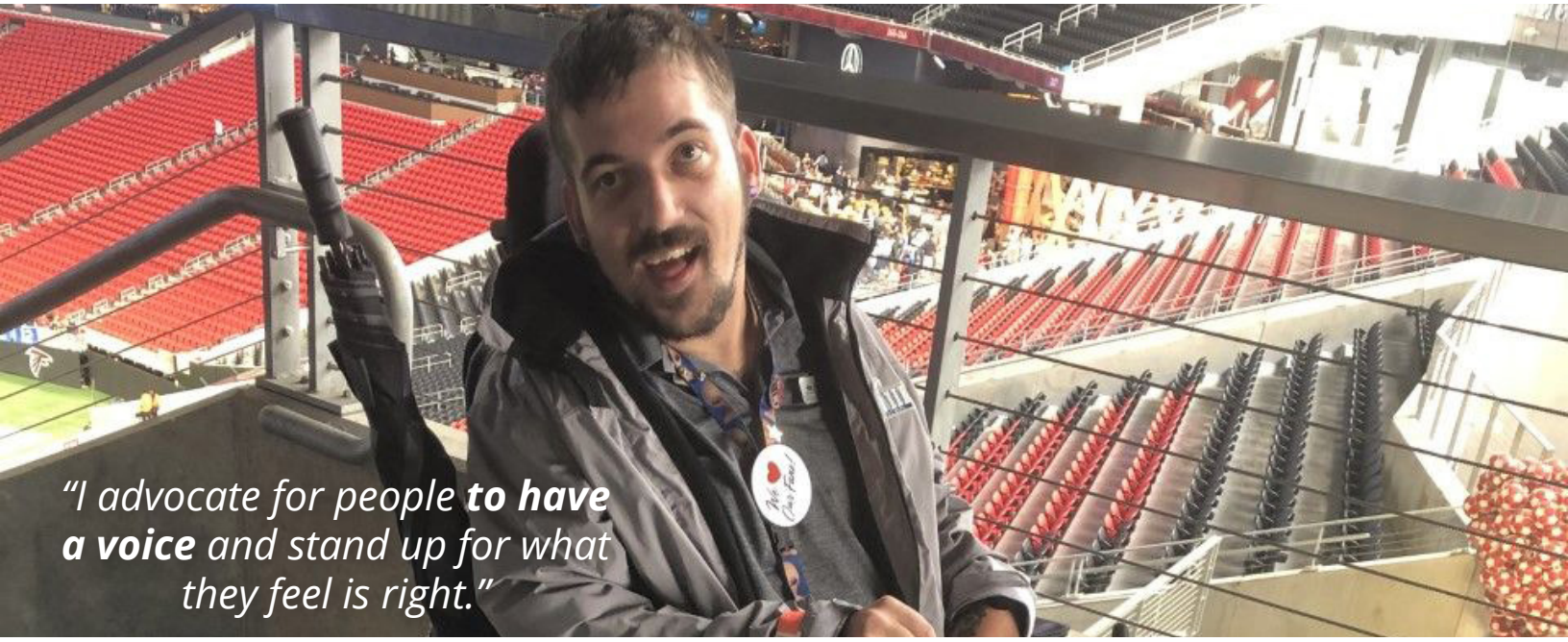
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

When You Share Your Voice

Ben O. - McDonough, Georgia



That's Medicaid *shares stories of people covered by Medicaid at critical points in their lives, underscoring the importance of stable health insurance coverage in building a Culture of Health.*

Ben has been on Medicaid all his life as a result of being born with cerebral palsy, and since becoming an adult he has become a fierce advocate for those with disabilities.

"We need to change how we view people with disabilities," he says. "I advocate for people to have a voice and stand up for what they feel is right and what they want."

Now in his early 30s, Ben received a waiver once he turned 18 under Georgia's Medicaid program that provided him with independence so he no longer had to rely on his parents for support. The state's waiver program helps people who are elderly or have disabilities and need help to live in their home or community instead of an institution such as a nursing home or other care facility.

Under this waiver, a caregiver helps Ben with daily tasks and takes him to public events where he teaches people about how to apply for the waiver and advocate for the program, which also supplies him with a wheelchair and other needed equipment.

"I always tell people, 'Do not let your disability define you, you define your disability,'" Ben says.

When not educating people about Medicaid, Ben works in the service industry, but his hours have been curtailed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nevertheless, he is using the time he would otherwise be working to consider new opportunities. "I find positivity in every situation," Ben says. "For the most part I am pretty upbeat."

"Medicaid has helped me find my identity as a person, and how I can extend beyond what I do as someone who lives with a disability."