

Overcoming Shame: A Therapist Shares her Own Victory Over Mental Illness

by Virginia in Illinois

I am a therapist with 25 years experience working with persons with serious mental illness. I am also someone who's lived with serious mental illness all my life. My diagnoses: major depression, recurrent Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.

Self-stigma and shame tied my tongue for many years. I disclosed my own history of mental illness to my clients, my colleagues, and my bosses just nine years ago and truly began to understand the joy of doing rehabilitation work from a recovery perspective. I am currently the first-ever Director of Recovery Services at a large psychiatric rehabilitation.

I want to get the message out that treatment works, that people can and do recover from mental illnesses. Recovery is the best kept secret in mental health because no one lets on that they ever had a history of mental illness! I have benefited from medication, which I take every day, but I also believe that there is a lot more to recovery. At some point, you must take responsibility for the quality of your life. You are more than your psychiatric label - and the best way to recover your true identity is to go outside yourself, into the community. Have adventures, take small risks, express yourself, love, give.

What has been most helpful to me in my ongoing recovery is the warm support of my family and friends. People with mental illnesses are some of the loneliest people I know, so continue to just spend time with your loved one. Trust that your continued presence in their life is a treasure, regardless of whether anybody ever says that quite so clearly. I have found my greatest happiness in working with my peers and doing my best to help them.