

With support and medication we can lead meaningful lives

by Charlie in Rhode Island

After having struggled with schizophrenia previously, I now live with it but no longer struggle with it, which is not to say that I sometimes don't struggle with problems. I was diagnosed with, at the time, schizoaffective, in my senior year in college. I was given the wrong treatment and diagnosis for six years, getting medications that didn't work, and no chance to feel comfortable expressing myself.

Then I started going to a Community Mental Health Center, where I got a medication that worked, to be followed a number of years later by an even better one, and started attending a support group, in which one of the social workers who runs the group is still there 27 years later. The medication and support have helped me to recover, which happened so gradually, that I cannot pinpoint when it happened. I also, in the past four years, have found a spiritual group that resonates with me, which gives me inspiration and peace, and has helped resolve what was an ongoing philosophical identity crisis. I meditate and attend classes and retreats with this group. My diagnosis now is paranoid schizophrenia. My main activity is consumer advocacy, which I do, working for my statewide NAMI. I am also the Chair of my statewide consumer group, which runs two drop-in centers, and a statewide mental health advocacy coalition, in which I work closely with the executive director of the statewide MHA. I run a consumer support group for NAMI, and am an administrative assistant in the office. I have spoken with many government officials about the need for better mental health treatment in my state, and I have encouraged others to speak out. I believe it is important to know that we can live in recovery with a mental illness without suffering from it.

For the first six years, I was on medications that didn't work, so when I got on a medication that did work, I saw an immediate difference, and have continued to take medication daily, although I was depressed for years while I was recovering, and still sometimes am. With support and medication, even if we do sometimes have symptoms, we can lead meaningful lives.