

Living Proof that Recovery is Possible

by Debi in Hawaii

My strength is derived from the passion I hold for advocating for those less fortunate than myself, specifically those adults and children that continue to suffer from mental illnesses.

I am a highly-motivated individual who chooses to use my own mental illness as an asset rather than a liability. My greatest desire is to place myself in the position to be of maximum service to others. I think it is important to state that I am still very young in my own recovery from mental illnesses and I still have much to learn. In addition, I am still learning how to effectively utilize boundary setting skills when mentoring other consumers in the adult mental health field. Overall, I firmly believe that these personal qualities will contribute to my success in my chosen field of study.

My ultimate professional goal is to serve the SPMI (serious and persistent mental illness) population as a clinical therapist. My short-term goal involves continuing to seek advancing opportunities in the human services field. Ultimately, I would like to implement services into the community-at-large that help to relieve stigma.

My chosen career is a reflection of my personal recovery story ... As an adolescent I endured years of extreme mental health problems and did not receive the necessary guidance or treatment to manage or overcome these problems. In my early and mid-twenties, I opted to "control" my emotional disturbances by utilizing illicit substances and alcohol. I knew very little about mental illnesses and the little information I did know was tainted by society's stigmas.

In 2003, at the age of 28, I voluntarily admitted myself to a long-term residential treatment center for alcohol and drug abuse. That is where I received the news that I had become an alcoholic, drug addict with co-occurring disorders, specifically depression, anxiety and PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). Initially, I was overwhelmed with grief and then I became grateful. I finally understood why I was the way I was.

For several years I immersed myself in the study of mental illnesses and the mental health system at both the state and federal levels. This information was provided to me at no charge through programs offered by the State of Hawaii and its Purchase of Service providers. In 2005, after successfully graduating from two evidence-based practices as a consumer of the Adult Mental Health Division, I received supported-employment services from a non-profit agency that is a state provider. This agency assisted me in securing the present full-time employment position that I now hold.

I am a full-time, live-in resident manager and life skills specialist for a group home that serves the SPMI adult population. On a daily basis, I work with other consumers by providing guidance on developing independent living skills and because earlier this year I completed training and passed the exam to become a nationally recognized Hawaii Certified Peer Specialist, I also provide peer mentoring services.

Today, I have maintained my sobriety and abstinence from any and all mind or mood altering substances for more than three years.

My situation is rare. I am a mental health consumer and an employee of a mental

health provider. I am living proof that recovery from substance abuse, alcohol and mental illnesses is possible.