

# Success Story

By Jennifer Williams

When I was asked to write a success story...I felt a flood of memories and emotions come to the surface...To think that almost 4 years ago I was losing my mind and lost in my symptoms and unable to live fully in the present moment. Living with a complexity of disorders I wondered if I'd ever really find the real me. 4 years ago I came through the doors of my local mental health agency shattered and broken and my moods out of control. I was a fearful person that suffered with high anxiety and was very emotionally explosive. I didn't know how to control my emotions nor did I have the skills to calm myself. I began to live my life around self-harm, having run -ins with the police because of my emotional distress, and going to the ER and in some cases ending up in residential treatment facilities. The summer of 2013 and into the fall of 2013 I basically lived in respite care because I was unsafe to live at home with my family due to my distress... I had no friends, I could not hold down a job, and I lived in constant fear and panic. I also suffered with major depression, bouts of mania, constant sensitivity to noises, and challenges with Borderline (BPD) and Complex Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (C-PTSD). I was also on seven medications in order to stabilize my current instability. I had to postpone a year of school and put my entire life on hold hoping desperately for some kind of miracle. I also filed for disability as I could no longer work due to the severity of my mental health.

One would think how could she rise above the ashes when all around her is nothing but a barren landscape? It is because I chose to walk through some hard places, complying to outpatient treatment and therapy every week, choosing to radically accept my current reality, letting go of the things that no longer served me and choosing to hope and believe in a higher power my creator God. I chose to embrace the ugliness of my mental illness and did not deny the reality of my symptoms. I also actively attended Dialectal Behavioral Therapy (DBT) groups weekly and other groups to support my recovery. It was no easy feat and it took 4 years for me to rebuild my life.

Looking back at who I once was and who I am now is inspiring to me personally and some days I think to myself how in the hell did I come back to life? The girl who lost touch with reality and could not rise above the noise of her mental health triggers and emotional distress is living and breathing again. I know that with having Bipolar disorder and having C-PTSD I will always be in Recovery but I have learned how to manage my symptoms and I've stopped playing around with my medications so that I can live a life where I can function beyond my bed and binge watching Netflix.

For the first time in years I am happy, I am a positive person who looks for joy even in the simplest of things...I know that I will have my bad days but I will also have many good days.

Supported Employment Specialist Cheryl Rhodes helped me list my skills and previous work experience in order to build my resume. SES-Cheryl Rhodes worked with me to build my confidence to get out and apply for work. She assisted me in doing online applications to apply for jobs that were available and

appealed to me. Cheryl was patient and allowed me to be in charge of my employment pursuits. She gave me continued encouragement and helped me to consider jobs that I would not have thought to pursue, even though they were related to my career goals. She helped me to prepare for my interview by practicing which allowed me to stay calm and focused during my interview. Now that I am employed Cheryl still supports me in many different ways. Cheryl assists me with making copies of my check stubs and submitting to Social Security Administration and provides me benefits counseling so I know how I'm doing with my employment income. Cheryl and I have monthly meeting with my employer to discuss how I am doing at my job and address any issues or concerns that I or my employer may have. Cheryl has been very supportive and on many occasions helped me through bumps in my recovery by encouraging me to utilize the tools I have acquired to move past any obstacles I may face.

I feel like Supported Employment "saved my life" by helping me overcome my anxiety and fear of finding employment on my own. Cheryl did not label me or let me label myself and encouraged me to keep actively pursuing my employment goals. I strongly recommend Supported Employment Services to anyone struggling and who wants to be employed/ I feel working with Supported Employment Specialist Cheryl Rhodes has been a great experience and life changing for me.

My job currently is as a Caregiver for Hearts of Gold who are located in the Columbia Gorge Area. The clients I work with are of the mental health population. My job duties vary per client. I'm a companion. I provide transportation for personal errands and various appointments. I help motivate my client to be self-sufficient in everyday living with things like bathing, dressing, eating, household chores and being active in the community.

Since I have been employed, I feel like I have a purpose in my life and something positive to focus on. I am more confident in my abilities and my abilities to help others. It has allowed me to realize that my goal of being a Mental Health Case Manager is realistic and within my ability to obtain. I have also realized that since being employed, my symptoms of mental health have lessened.

I find it rewarding and fulfilling to inspire and bring hope to my clients. I share what I've learned through my own recovery to help her succeed in her own life. I enjoy the social interaction and have the opportunity to bring laughter and joy to my client. I also enjoy being a part of and celebrating milestones with my client.

My plans for my future will be to work at Mid-Columbia Center for Living as a Case Manager in Mental Health Services. I am working towards going back to school to finish my Master's in Clinical Social Work. I would love to one day take a trip and tour Europe and see historical sites that relate to WWII.

My family and friends have seen positive changes in my behavior and well-being since I have become employed. They find me an inspiration and admire the strength it has taken me to accomplish this so far.