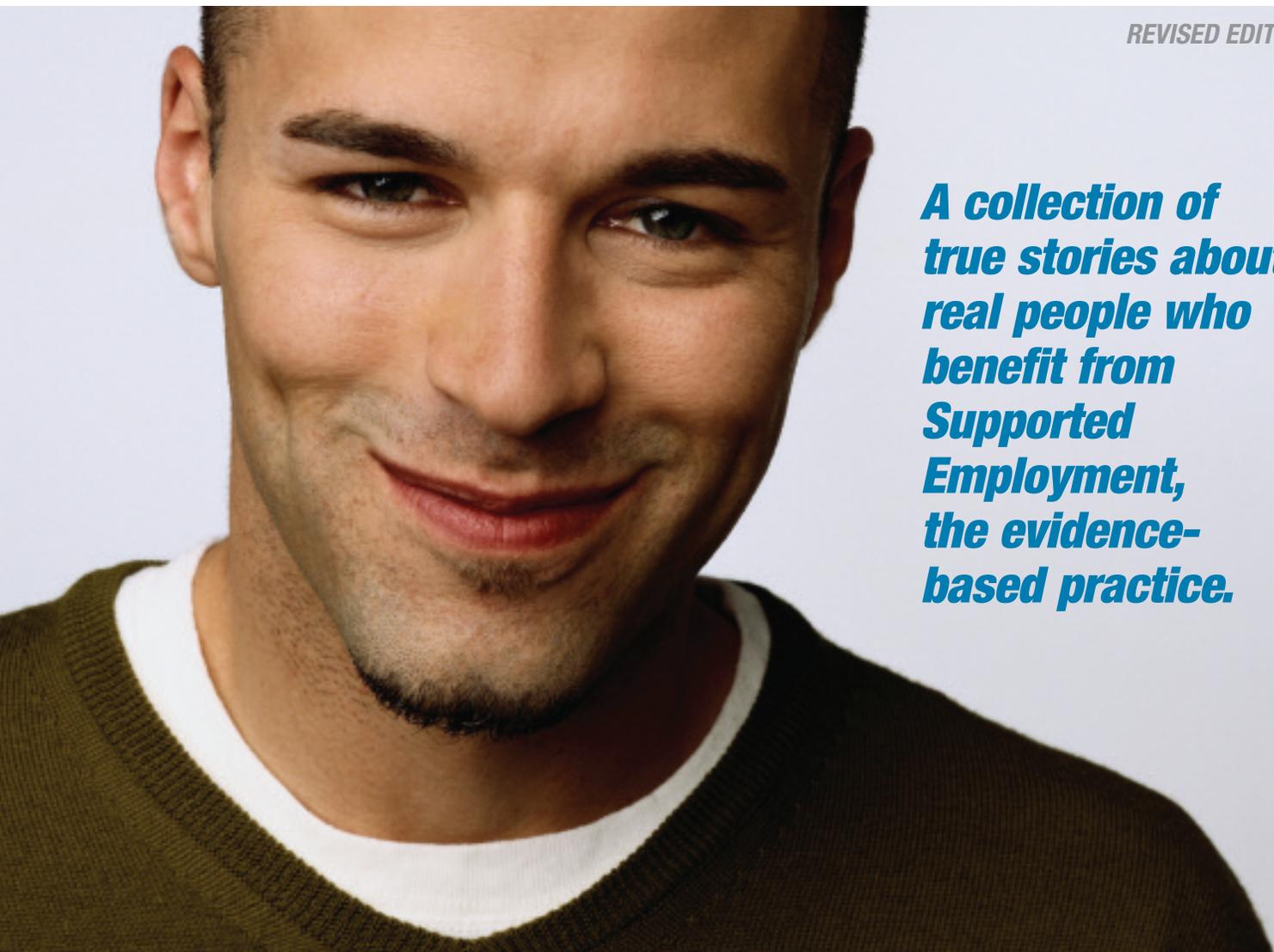




SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT | the evidence-based practice

Work is Recovery

REVISED EDITION



A collection of true stories about real people who benefit from Supported Employment, the evidence-based practice.

Produced by the Center for Evidence-Based Practices (CEBP) at Case Western Reserve University and its Ohio Supported Employment Coordinating Center of Excellence (Ohio SE CCOE) initiative with support from the Ohio Department of Mental Health and the Johnson & Johnson-Dartmouth Community Mental Health Program.

www.centerforebp.case.edu



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TRUE STORIES. REAL PEOPLE.

PASSION TO SUCCEED

– by Paul M. Kubek, MA; Nicole Clevenger, BFA; Sarah Swanson, MRC, LSW, CRC; and Patrick E. Boyle, MSSA, LISW, LICDC

The purpose of this booklet is to tell some good stories, ones that are informative, entertaining, and inspiring. The booklet is also intended to provoke conversations—to get you talking about the stories, your own experiences, and how you might get involved with evidence-based Supported Employment services in your local communities.



WHO? YOU

This collection of back-to-work success stories is written primarily for the following:

- Anyone diagnosed with a mental illness who wants to work
- Employers
- Employees
- Health and human-service providers
- Policy makers
- Community advocates
- Family members

A REAL JOB IS A GOOD THING

This is a collection of stories about people who want to work. Those who are featured have all been diagnosed at some point in their lives with a mental disorder (mental illness). Many have struggled with symptoms for a long time and have left previous jobs or delayed pursuing a career because of their symptoms. So, the stories describe some hard times. Yet, more importantly, the stories also chronicle the triumphs of recovery and the importance of employment in supporting the journey.

The people in these stories have all found work in a competitive job of *their* choice in local communities throughout the State of Ohio with help from mental health and vocational rehabilitation service providers who use Supported Employment (SE), the

evidence-based practice. SE is different from traditional vocational programs because it utilizes rapid job-search and placement services as well as time-unlimited individualized follow-along services, among other components (see sidebar on page 3). By competitive employment we mean a job that pays at least minimum wage that anyone may apply for. No sheltered workshops. No pre-job training programs. We're talking real jobs with employers who are in the business of making money in the marketplace.

OPTIMISM & OTHER POSITIVE ATTITUDES

Many of the successes in the following stories occurred because the people who are featured sought or received help from family members, service providers, and employers who have a

Photos on this page, front cover and back cover by Photodisc/Getty Images.

positive attitude about them and do not stigmatize mental illness. Stigma is the act of labeling someone as an outcast—as not normal: it creates an *us-versus-them* relationship. Stigma produces experiences of separation and isolation, which create very difficult feelings such as embarrassment and shame. What makes the experience of mental illness stigmatizing in contemporary culture is due, in part, to a general lack of understanding about it. Therefore, we hope this booklet contributes to the national effort to transform stigmatizing beliefs into public awareness, acceptance, and advocacy.

There are many categories of mental illness and, thus, many identifiable symptoms. Yet, symptoms may be understood in general terms as feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and behaviors. Symptoms may be mild, moderate, or severe, and they may be temporary, periodic, or persistent. We are using this everyday language intentionally to make this point. Mental health and mental illness are a part of our collective human experience: the potential for both co-exists in each of us continuously.

Here is another important point to remember. Symptoms may or may not impair our abilities to take care of ourselves and our family members, to maintain relationships with others, and to achieve and maintain personal goals like employment with success and satisfaction. However, severe and persistent symptoms that remain untreated often do. Supported Employment is an effective form of treatment.

A FOCUS ON PERSONAL STRENGTHS

We have learned from those who were interviewed for these stories that people who support mental health recovery relate to those in need as people with feelings, thoughts, perceptions, talents, and skills and not as a diagnosis, “the ill”, “the disabled”, or any other stigmatizing category that sets them apart from other members of their families and communities. Effective supporters also do not dwell upon the negatives—namely, the limitations that symptoms sometimes impose. Instead, they work with limitations in such a way that accommodates and transforms them. The same seems to be true about employers who support recovery. They appear to have an intuitive positive outlook about people and their desires and abilities to work. In addition, they make the effort to collaborate with Supported-Employment specialists and to make accommodations (often very minor accommodations) to maximize employee satisfaction and productivity.

Having positive support from other people is not unique to the experience of mental health recovery and Supported Employment services; however, it is especially important not to overlook its crucial role in recovery, as well as in everyday life. No one is successful at work single handedly, not even entrepreneurs and other business owners. Each of us relies upon others—coworkers, colleagues, family members, and friends—to vent emotion, to brainstorm, to problem solve, to strategize, to share the stories of our successes, to do our jobs well.

SELF-DETERMINATION: MAKING MONEY

Every person featured in these stories wants to work, because he or she has found within himself or herself the need to work. For some, there is simply a conscious need to get out of the house. For others, there is a conscious need to invest time, attention, and energy away from symptoms and into problems that need to be solved elsewhere. And for all, there is a need not to be consumed by an identity of illness. There is also the need to exercise self-determination in the marketplace—that is, to make money, to pay bills, and to buy stuff. A competitive job fulfills these needs. Those who have jobs know that symptoms and illness do not define who they are. There is a healthy self: the accomplishments of work prove it.

RELATIONSHIPS THAT INSPIRE

Research shows that evidence-based Supported Employment (SE) services produce good outcomes when service providers completely integrate its core components into their day-to-day practices. SE is most productive when employers, clients of mental health services, and their family members do not feel as if they are participating in a special program but, rather, are simply collaborating with each other toward a common goal—that is, to make sure that potential employees find and keep the jobs they want and that employers find and keep the productive employees they need to operate a successful business.

SE is effective because its core principles encourage professional behavior that produces a social environment which enables everyone involved—service providers, employers, consumers, family members—to build safe, trusting, long-term relationships. It is these relationships that promote and support positive personal change. And it is the accumulation of these personal changes that creates large-scale social transformation over time. Every individual counts. We invite you to invest your creativity and passion in the cause of recovery.



SUCCESS STORIES

The people featured in this collection of stories have found work in a competitive job of their choice in local communities in the State of Ohio.

SUPPORTERS OF RECOVERY

The following are also featured in this collection of stories:

- Employer (page 10)
- Service providers (pages 12, 14, 20)
- Family member (page 8)

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

the evidence-based practice

7 CORE PRINCIPLES

1. Zero Exclusion Policy
2. Consumer Preferences are Important
3. Rapid Job Search
4. A Competitive Job is the Goal
5. Employment is Integrated with Mental Health Services
6. Time-Unlimited Support
7. Personalized Benefits Planning

(For more information, see page 23.)

Nicole Clevenger, BFA, is a peer consultant at the Ohio Supported Employment Coordinating Center of Excellence (Ohio SE CCOE). In this role, she provides consultation to service organizations and SE teams about how to enhance services to people who have been diagnosed with mental illness. She also provides consultation to consumer groups.



Photo of Nicole Clevenger by Richard Gallaher

Ms. Clevenger wrote all the stories in this collection. She also created the artwork that appears on this page.

“One of the characteristics of being oppressed is having one’s stories buried under the forces of ignorance and stereotype.”

—Dennis Saleebey (2001). *The Strengths Perspective in Social Work Practice*. New York, NY: Longman Press.

ARTIST’S STATEMENT

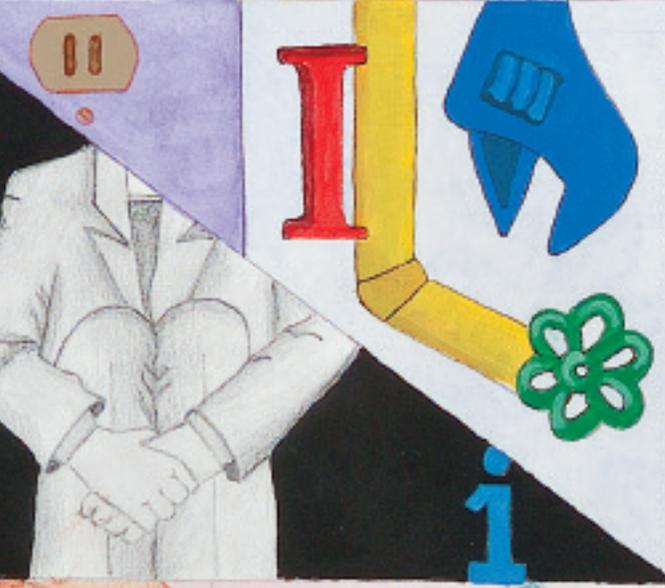
The sentiment expressed in the quote above reminds me of how women and slaves created quilts to communicate and preserve their own histories. So I used a quilt-like design for this piece: each rectangle represents a story featured in this booklet. The quote itself is the border of the design, because it unites the stories. As I wrote the profiles featured in this collection, I was continually inspired to select my words in a way that would honor people’s unique experiences and celebrate their successes without exploiting them or minimizing their struggles. This is an ongoing effort in my work as a peer consultant—to tell stories not just about people with mental illness but also to uncover the experiences of the universal human condition that we all share.

—Nicole Clevenger, BFA

One of the characteristics of being oppressed is having one's stories buried under the forces of ignorance and stereotype.



Characteristics of being oppressed is having one's stories buried under the forces



of ignorance and stereotypes. One of



HARVEY

Initiative

—by Nicole Clevenger, BFA

It is often said that actions speak louder than words. If so, Harvey Null's back-to-work story is louder than it appears in print. Harvey does not spend much time talking about what he is going to do. He just does it. Nor does he spend much time talking about his recovery. He just lives it. Therein, the story lies.

ALLEVIATING BOREDOM

A few years ago, Harvey had a newspaper route to keep himself from getting bored. He delivered newspapers from 1 to 7 a.m. six days a week for 35 dollars per week. It was a lot of work for a little money, but he wanted something to do. Ultimately, the paper route was not challenging enough and did not pay enough, so he began to think about getting a new job, perhaps in a factory doing the kind of work he had done in the past.

He found what he was looking for at a local shop that produces plastics. He was hired, and he had to walk two miles to the job and two miles home every day, but it was worth the effort because he enjoyed the work.

"It gave me self-esteem to do it," he says. "I felt I was slowly getting my life back together."

NOT HAVING IT TOGETHER

Harvey continues to enjoy his job at the plastics factory, and he finds unwavering support from a team of service providers at Appleseed Community Mental Health Center in Ashland County, Ohio. Harvey first sought services from Appleseed in 1994 when he was experiencing severe symptoms of schizophrenia, including auditory hallucinations.

"When I got there, I didn't know which end was up, or left from right," he says. "I was in a bad way."

He began working with a psychiatrist at Appleseed as well as a case manager and others. The team helped him begin to manage his symptoms and to overcome the devastating effects of his illness.

WORKING TOGETHER TO GET IT TOGETHER

Gradually, Harvey recovered his ability to think more clearly and to assert his desire to work. When he decided to begin the paper route, the service team at Appleseed supported his decision. When he began to talk about finding a job in a factory, the team supported him again. His supported-employment specialist helped him secure the



Photodisc/Getty Images

"People are afraid to go to work because they are afraid to lose benefits. Truth is, you make more money working."

position at the plastics factory by helping him prepare for the interview. Also, once he was hired, she helped him get accustomed to his tasks by working alongside him for his entire first day. Eventually, his case manager helped him set up a savings account and obtain his driver's license. And when he received a pay raise, his supported-employment specialist helped him manage his benefits.

Harvey continues to see his psychiatrist, who helps him manage his medication, and thus, his symptoms....The symptoms do not prevent him from performing well on the job.

"People are afraid to go to work because they are afraid to lose benefits," Harvey says. "Truth is, you make more money working."

Harvey continues to see his psychiatrist, who helps him manage his medication, and thus, his symptoms. He reports that he still hears voices at times, but he hears them more at home than at work. The symptoms do not prevent him from performing well on the job.

ACCOMPLISHMENT: THE BEST EVIDENCE OF RECOVERY

It has been just over a year since Harvey started his factory job, and he now has extra money for those times when, as he says, "I need a few bucks here and there."

That phrase, *a few bucks*, is an understatement that is so characteristic of Harvey's style. In fact, the job has enabled him to save enough money to buy a car, so he no longer has to walk the four-mile roundtrip to and from work every day. He drives himself instead. Reflect for a moment upon the significance of this achievement—the acquisition of automobile-enhanced self-sufficiency. It says more about Harvey's recovery than five-hundred or one-thousand words ever could.

Nicole Clevenger, BFA, is a peer consultant at the Ohio SE CCOE.



ASHLAND COUNTY

Appleseed Community
Mental Health Center
1126 Cottage St
Ashland, OH 44805-1764



iStockphoto



JUDY & JOYCE

Companionship & Family Support

—by Nicole Clevenger, BFA

Judy and Joyce are sisters. As sisters often do, they share many things, including a history rich with common experiences from childhood and adolescence. Thus, the threads of each woman's unique perspective interweave to form the fabric of their special relationship. They have a strong connection: their voices have a similar cadence and tone; they have private jokes; they have common stories; they finish each other's sentences. What affects one sister, by virtue of this bond, affects the other. Therefore, it is not surprising that certain topics stir intense emotions in both women, even if for very different reasons. One such topic is Judy's recovery from mental illness.

COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN

Today, their interaction seems so natural and effortless; yet, there was a time when these sisters did not communicate very well. Ten years ago, severe symptoms of depression and side effects of medication forced Judy to spend her days mostly sleeping, watching T.V., and smoking cigarettes. She could not muster the motivation to do much else. It was a life to which she had grown accustomed. Her symptoms were so debilitating that she had

been hospitalized in a psychiatric unit every year for eight years. She was living with her mother and her aunt, had never lived alone, and had not worked in 20 years.

These were difficult days for Joyce as well, because it was hard for her to watch Judy suffer from such extreme depression. She hoped for change and would often say and do things in an effort to improve her sister's mood—to cheer her up.

Judy remembers watching with much sadness as Joyce attempted unsuccessfully to make her laugh. She remembers thinking to herself, "I am here, Joyce, but I can't reach you right now."

AN AMAZING TRANSFORMATION

Joyce is the Director of Vocational Services at Clermont Counseling Center, a mental health service provider in Clermont County, Ohio. She remembers 1989. Judy announced that she wanted to move to the county to be closer to her sister, her mother, and the Center, where she planned to acquire mental health services. At first, Joyce had mixed emotions about this idea. As a family member, she was afraid that



Judy (right) and her sister Joyce (left)

Photo of Judy and Joyce by Nicole Clevenger

"Recovery is a process. . . . It is often slow. I take it one step at a time. For me, it is about not going to the hospital and working within my capabilities. It is an ongoing journey."

—Judy

her sister's proximity would require her to provide more care and, thus, exhaust her already dwindling energy to cope with her sister's severe mental illness. Yet, as a supported-employment specialist and mental health provider, Joyce was hopeful because she knew that with the right support her sister could make significant progress in her recovery.

Eventually, Judy made the move to Clermont County, and the years between 1989 and 2002 were a turning point for her. More accurately, though, this was a turning period, because the turning point in her recovery was actually more than a decade in the making. Once she began to make use of the services at the Counseling Center, Judy began to believe she could get better.

"Recovery is a process," she says. "It is often slow. I take it one step at a time. For me, it is about not going to the hospital and working within my capabilities. It is an ongoing journey."

ENCIRCLED IN RECOVERY

Today, Judy lives independently in her own apartment. She has been working part time in a competitive job in a local restaurant for over four years. With this independence she has become more than just a sister who needs care. She is, once again, a friend and companion. In fact, Judy and Joyce take vacations together whenever possible.

Of course, Joyce is among those who have surrounded Judy to support her recovery. However, many other people have played a part in her transformation, including a treatment team that helped her learn about medications and provided direction and encouragement about other treatments, including employment.

"I finally found the right medicine, so I could figure out who I really am," Judy says. "I used to be frozen in a mask of medication."

In addition, the housing staff at the Counseling Center helped Judy secure her first apartment. A recovery coordinator, also known as a case manager, was a vital link between Judy and the community resources she needed to become independent. Also, at times, the crisis team has intervened with support. According to Judy, even the office support staff has had an important role in her recovery, because they always treat her with kindness and respect.

Returning to work was a major achievement. After being unemployed for 20 years, Judy had many reservations about finding a job. The vocational services team at the Counseling

Center helped her overcome these uncertainties by connecting her with the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR), which paid for job-placement services and ongoing job coaching that was provided by the Center's Work Initiative Network (WIN) Vocational Service Team. Today, Judy is no longer the woman who stays home "frozen by the mask of medication." She is more animated, more lively.

"Work has absolutely brought purpose for my sister," says Joyce. "Now she sees herself as a valuable member of this community. She has a social sphere, church, co-workers. It has been like breathing life back into her. Judy is herself again."

Judy quickly adds, "Now, I spring out of bed ready for work every day. Joyce takes more naps than I do!" The sisters laugh. They find humor in this quip. They find humor in its truth.

Through the efforts of many, Judy has gained and sustained an independence and resiliency she has not known before. She has remained out of the hospital, even as she (and Joyce) has experienced three devastating losses—the deaths of her mother, aunt, and another sister. Judy attributes much of her current stability to her job and the continuous follow-along services she receives from the Clermont Counseling Center.

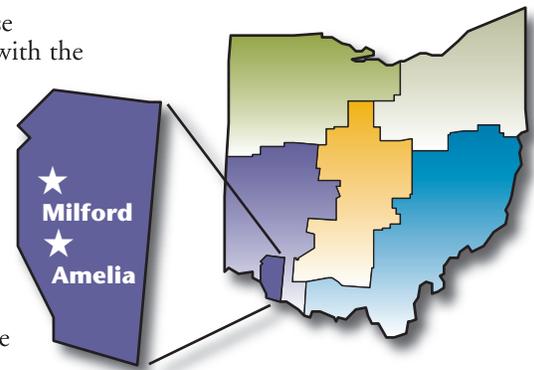
FOLLOW-ALONG PROVIDES SECURITY FOR CLIENTS AND FAMILIES

Every two weeks, someone from the vocational staff at the Center visits Judy at her job to discuss how things are going. They enlist the assistance of a job coach from time to time as Judy acquires new responsibilities.

"I find comfort as a family member in the follow-along services," says Joyce. "I count on it. I am supported because they support Judy. It can be very draining to try to take care of everything yourself."

Judy sometimes experiences challenges both on and off the job, but Joyce does not have to worry every day about how her sister is going to handle these situations. She explains that the staff at the Counseling Center pulls out the "safety net" when Judy needs a little extra help. The security of the services gives both Joyce and Judy peace of mind and the confidence to embrace the future without fear.

Nicole Clevenger, BFA, is a peer consultant at the Ohio SE CCOE.



CLERMONT COUNTY

Clermont Counseling Center
www.clermontcounseling.org

43 East Main Street
Amelia, Ohio 45102
513-947-7000

512 High Street
Milford, Ohio 45150
513-947-7000

"I find comfort as a family member in the follow-along services. . . . I count on it. I am supported because [the service providers] support Judy. It can be very draining to try to take care of everything yourself."

—Joyce



PAUL & HIS EMPLOYER



Photo of Paul by Nicole Clevenger

Someone suggested that perhaps Paul should move into a nursing home, but he immediately rejected the idea. Instead, Paul formulated his own definition of recovery. He believed he could work, be self-sufficient, and live independently.

Work Ethic

—by Nicole Clevenger, BFA

On weekends, you will find Paul Yuzva in the kitchen of a very popular national Italian restaurant chain in Mentor, Ohio. Here, the “dinner rush” lives up to its name, and Paul helps keep things running smoothly. At 3 p.m. he meets with the chef to plan the coming day. They organize and prioritize, then Paul slips on his apron and gloves and gets down to work. He peels potatoes. He portions pasta. He prepares bread for the oven, pausing frequently to tidy his work area and to change the water for sanitizing his utensils. On occasion when he finishes early, he cleans and completes other miscellaneous tasks as needed.

AN EMPLOYER’S PERSPECTIVE OF A VALUABLE EMPLOYEE

The executive chef* explains that Paul is a great employee because of what he brings to the job. He never gripes or grumbles and happily fulfills his role in the spirit of teamwork. The executive chef finds this attitude refreshing.

“It is comforting to have Paul in the building,” he says. “He is a pleasure to work with and he brings everybody’s spirits up. We have a good time.” He adds that Paul is very conscientious:

he is vigilant about cleanliness, wants to do his job well, and is eager to learn. “Paul was very self-conscious at first about whether he was doing a good job or not. Now, he only asks for a little feedback. He’s got it down. He gets the job done.”

Paul is punctual and reliable. He never misses work, and although he does not own a car or drive, he consistently arrives early for his shift. He feels that dependability is the foundation of the trust that his employer has in him. Certainly, these are invaluable qualities in the restaurant industry, which is known for its high employee turnover. In fact, the restaurant hired and parted company with several employees before they hired Paul a year ago. “We got him by luck,” the executive chef says.

HOW PAUL SEES IT

Paul believes he is a hard worker because he is proactive and energetic, committed to excellence, fast but thorough, and never sacrifices quality in his pursuit of efficiency. He laughs as he admits that he does ask a lot of questions. He shrugs and explains that his attention to detail is all a part of quality assurance.

"I don't just want to get the job done. I want to get it done right," he emphasizes.

There are times when Paul does not feel like working, but he chooses to do it anyway. He gets through the depressive mood by reminding himself that his shift does not last forever, and with this assurance, it becomes less daunting to go. Paul explains that in moments like these he makes a conscious decision to cope. He has, in fact, been coping for over 10 years—and he is only 30.

A TURBULENT CHILDHOOD, A STEADFAST CHILD

Paul was diagnosed with schizophrenia when he was 18-years old, which complicated the already confusing and often tumultuous process of growing up.

He recalls having had a lot of problems with motivation when his illness was at its worst. At times, he even found it difficult to shower or get dressed. As he got older, someone suggested that perhaps he move into a nursing home, but Paul immediately rejected the idea and, instead, formulated his own definition of recovery. He believed he could work, be self-sufficient, and live independently.

COMMITMENT: A CONSISTENT EFFORT TO IMPROVE

"I used to not like myself very much," Paul says, explaining that his lack of self-esteem directly related to his lack of purpose in society. Therefore, for him, having a job was not just a want; it was a need.

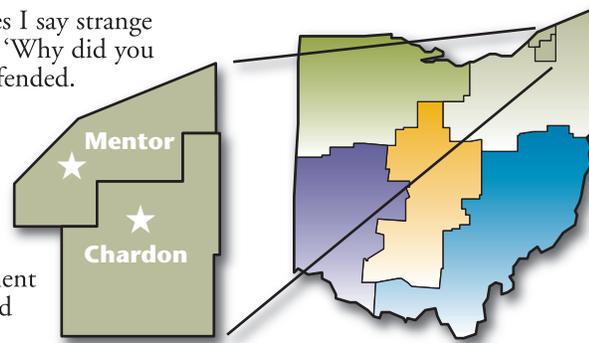
The fusion of desire and drive pushed him to pursue his goals. So in 2004, with the help of an employment specialist at NEIGHBORING, a mental health services provider in Lake County (see sidebar map), he began looking for work. When he was hired at the Italian restaurant, he was excited and admittedly quite anxious. He was afraid of not getting his tasks done and he was self-conscious about what people would think and say about his mental illness. It was very difficult to adjust to his job at first, but his motivation to succeed far outweighed his misgivings.

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Paul admits that his comfort level is much higher now. He describes the feeling of being at work as similar to that of being in the company of good friends. Over the past year, Paul and the other employees have gotten to know one another better. It has been a learning process for everyone.

Paul elaborates. "Sometimes I say strange things and people will ask, 'Why did you say that,' but I don't get offended.

They are just trying to understand." He explains that he does not take these questions personally—that is, as an offense. This demonstrates his commitment to professionalism and good judgment.



PATIENCE PAYS OFF

Looking back, The executive chef knows that his intuition about Paul during their first meeting was on target.

"Paul's character stood out to me," he says. "I was confident that he could do the job I wanted."

Over the past year, this confidence has only strengthened. In fact, when Paul masters one aspect of his job, the chef adds new duties to keep him interested. For example, Paul was recently given the responsibility of stocking the kitchen with fresh bread. In this way, he grows with his job according to his own pace.

The executive chef has advice for other employers. "Patience will pay-off," he says. "As with anyone, you have to take the time to train people. If you do that, it will be one less thing you have to worry about."

LOOKING FORWARD

Paul's employer feels that Paul will determine his level of success in years to come and that he will take his career as far as he wants to take it. Paul has some definite ideas about this as well. He would one day like to become a chef himself.

Clearly, Paul is committed to his future, to his recovery, and to his career. He feels that others with mental illness can learn by his example.

"Think about your dreams—and then go for it," he says. "You have to take risks, or you have nothing to gain."

Nicole Clevenger, BFA, is a peer consultant at the Ohio SE CCOE.

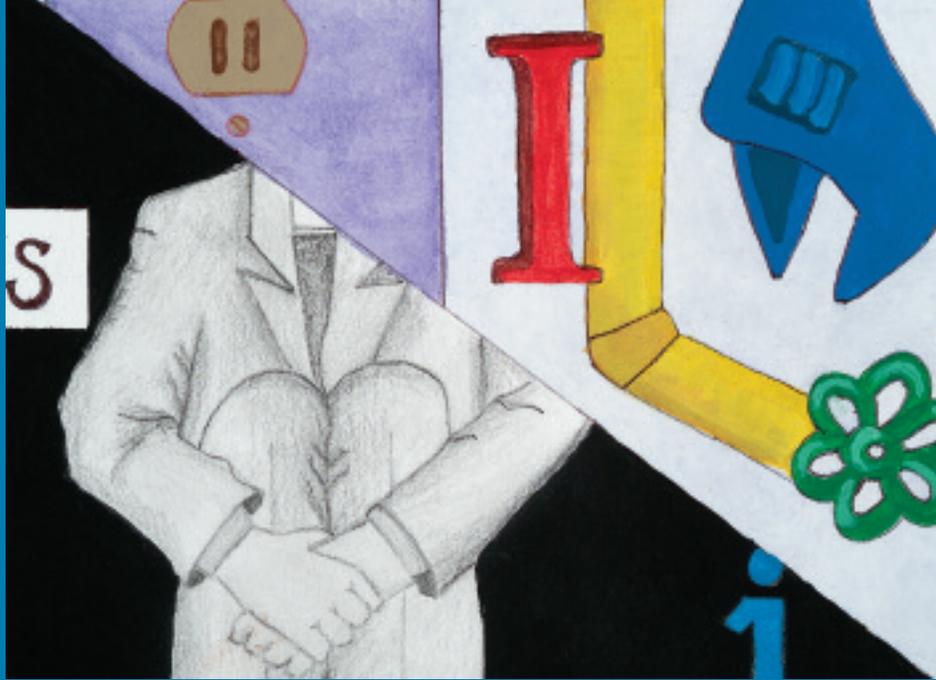
**Editor's note: The executive chef who was interviewed for this story was the person who hired Paul and was his immediate supervisor while this story was being written. By the time this story was being prepared for print, the chef had left the restaurant for another employment opportunity. Paul continues to work in the kitchen. He starts his shift promptly at 3 p.m., as usual.*

LAKE COUNTY

NEIGHBORING
www.neighboring.org

Lake County
5930 Heisley Rd.
Mentor, Ohio 44060
440-354-9924

Geauga County
115 Wilson Mills Rd.
Chardon, Ohio 44024
440-286-7448



WILSON



Photo of Wilson by Nicole Clevenger

In his job as supervisor at the department store, Wilson is responsible for hiring employees for the maintenance crew. It is a role that brings him great joy.

Personable

—by Nicole Clevenger, BFA

Wilson is the kind of man who likes surprises. He is 58 years old, and at this age, one might think there are not many things that catch him off guard. However, the events that have transpired during his return to work have been nothing short of shocking to him.

AN UNEXPECTED TURN OF EVENTS

One day three years ago, Wilson went to a job interview at a large national department store in a local shopping mall to apply for a maintenance position. He brought a copy of his resume, spoke briefly with a representative of the company, and climbed back into his car with little expectation of being hired. You see, because of his age, Wilson was convinced that prospective employers would not seriously consider him for a job. He was completely unprepared for what happened next.

Driving home from the interview, his cell phone rang. He answered, and a manager from the store said that he could not hire him for the position for which he had applied. Wilson was sure that his fear of being too old to work had become a reality. His heart sank. The manager further explained that Wilson was overqualified for the maintenance position, and the store was interested in hiring him as a supervisor instead. In partial disbelief, Wilson

laughed heartily out loud with delight. He thought, “This has to be a joke!”

IT WAS NOT A JOKE

Wilson accepted the job offer and is now supervisor of the cleaning and retail technicians for the department store, which is located in Lorain County. His qualifications and training are outstanding. He is certified in heating, ventilating and air conditioning (HVAC) as well as carpentry, electricity, and plumbing.

Although he has his own office, he does not spend much time there. He is in the store, overseeing the work of his staff and contractors. He also performs a range of tasks himself. One minute he may need to fix a boiler, air conditioner, or elevator, and the next minute he might need to fix shelves and clothing racks, or even simply change a burned-out light bulb.

“I do everything,” he laughs. “That’s what you call job security.”

Wilson enjoys making rounds throughout the store, because he gets to interact with other staff members. He likes to small talk, to tease, to share stories and jokes. The interaction gives him a chance to build rapport—a friendly atmosphere of trust—with the people he serves.

FEELING SMALL

The joy that is so obvious in Wilson today is in direct contrast to the painful sadness that he felt in the recent past. Several years ago, he was unemployed, depressed, and virtually drowning in alcoholism. As a result of his drinking, he lost everything: his job, his family, his self-respect. As time passed, he felt smaller and smaller, and, eventually, he felt almost unnoticeable.

One day during this dark period, Wilson drove a friend to an appointment at The Nord Center, a provider of mental health services in Lorain County. Waiting outside in his car, Wilson continued to struggle silently with depression. His friend noticed that he appeared more distraught than usual and gently urged him to go inside the Center to ask for help. He listened. He went in. On that day, his life began to change.

WILSON TAKES A CHANCE

With the help of a team of service providers at the Center (e.g., a psychiatrist, mental health therapist, addictions counselor, etc.), Wilson embarked on a journey toward sobriety. He started to take medication for his depression and began mental health therapy and substance abuse counseling to understand the intense emotions that were causing him to drink. He also started to attend Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings regularly and to work with an AA sponsor.

Almost a year into his recovery, he expressed the desire to find a job again, and he began to work with a supported-employment specialist at The Nord Center to achieve his goal. Yet, a part of him remained skeptical.

“I thought that if I took employment services, they would just find me a job to keep me busy,” he says. “I had a very good job before all this happened. I was so depressed because I thought I would never find a decent job again.”

He was also concerned that he would be asked to file for Social Security. Case Manager Hilda Muñoz, CCDC III, LPN, assured him that he would not be required to apply for disability insurance and that he was not too old to find a job he liked. She recalls helping him focus on the positives in his life—his strengths and his desires.

With funding from the Ohio Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR),

Wilson enrolled in a maintenance training program, and with Hilda’s encouragement, he applied for a job at a manufacturing company. He got that job, but the company soon went out of business. So Hilda encouraged him to look for another job. This time he applied at the department store. He explains that her belief in him and her support sustains him even today as he struggles with occasional panic attacks. Despite these episodes of anxiety, he continues to go to work daily.

“If you like what you are doing, it really helps,” he says. “I found that out.”

GIVING BACK

In his job as supervisor at the department store, Wilson is responsible for hiring employees for the maintenance crew. It is a role that brings him great joy.

“It feels good to hire people,” he says. “It’s amazing, really. I got help, and now I can help somebody else, too. I give people a chance.”

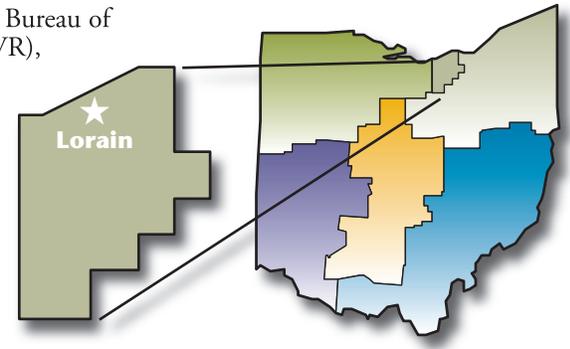
DELIGHTFUL SURPRISES

One day not too long ago, Wilson marched into Hilda’s office and, with a smile on his face, asked her to accompany him to the parking lot. She asked why, but Wilson would not say. When she arrived outside, she saw a bright-white full-sized pickup truck parked before her.

“It’s mine,” he said proudly. “And I am paying for it all by myself!”

Wilson’s determination to have a competitive job has opened doors that he thought were closed forever. As a result of the extra money and improved self-esteem, he is on a path toward financial independence. He has also begun to rebuild relationships with his children, who live out of state. Of all the surprises that have occurred during his recovery journey, this chance to reconnect with the people he loves most is undoubtedly the best of all.

Nicole Clevenger, BFA, is a peer consultant at the Ohio SE CCOE.



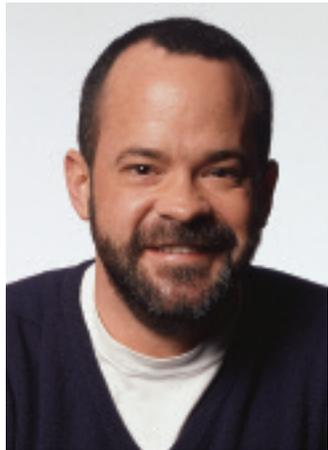
LORAIN COUNTY

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DAVID & PHYLLIS



Photodisc/Getty Images

David is a full-time single parent and a college student.

Case Manager Phyllis Wilcox, BA, CPST, TO, is constantly looking for the hidden potential in the people she serves.

Courage to Believe

—by Nicole Clevenger, BFA

Phyllis Wilcox, BA, CPST, TO, is a case manager at NEIGHBORING, a provider of mental health services in Lake County, Ohio. She is the kind of person one hopes for when needing help. To her, clients are real people with real dreams, not just manila folders in a stack on her desk. Phyllis understands that people often need case management during a low point in their lives. She believes that the circumstances of a crisis are temporary, that the picture of the person before her is a mere snapshot in time and not a complete portrait of the person's identity.

Phyllis is constantly looking for the hidden potential in the people she serves, not just the potential to survive but to thrive. While she ensures her clients get basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing, she does not stop there. Her focus is on long-term recovery, which includes education and employment. By assisting people with their goals for work and school, Phyllis helps her clients build a stable foundation for the future.

Take David, for instance, who has been working with Phyllis for over two years. Together, they have achieved what some people thought was impossible. David has schizophrenia, but he and Phyllis refuse to let the diagnosis become his identity. David is a full-time single parent and a college student. He attends classes at a local community college, taking a bus 90 minutes to and from class two days per week. His ultimate goal is to become a paralegal. He currently maintains a 2.5 grade point average and is well on his way to achieving his dream.

BUMPS IN THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

David's story becomes even more remarkable when one considers that only two years ago, he was homeless. Back then, when he and Phyllis first met, she helped him find housing. Then, she asked him about his plans for the future. She listened to him, intently, and learned of his dream to work as a paralegal. So they devised a plan together, dividing up the tasks needed to enroll him in school. Phyllis made sure he had all the tasks he was capable of handling.

“My job is not to take over, that’s no good,” Phyllis says. “I want to help people however I can to be more independent. If I did things for people that they are capable of doing for themselves, it would be a disservice.”

The first thing Phyllis and David did was fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Next, they applied for financial assistance from an organization that would hopefully provide additional funding for tuition and books. After some initial paperwork and exams, the organization unfortunately decided that David was not ready for school and declined to help. Phyllis was not discouraged, though. She viewed the situation as a detour instead of a roadblock and discussed with David an alternate plan to secure the money he needed from other sources.

“I was so frustrated,” Phyllis recalls. “I sort of felt like he was getting the run-around. But, ultimately, we did it anyway.”

There was another challenge that David faced which did not disrupt his success. It was a few weeks into his first quarter at school when he discovered that his roommates were using drugs. He decided to protect himself: he decided to find another place to live. Phyllis supported him.

“I was afraid for him,” she admits. “To have to move like that in the middle of your first semester at school? That’s stressful. He handled it very well. Amazing.”

Also during that first year in college, David faced another big challenge. He began a court battle for full custody of his then three-month old son. Single parenthood is difficult for anyone who faces it, and Phyllis knew David would have extra responsibilities, namely managing the symptoms of his mental illness and the demands of his school commitments. Yet, she did not shrink away from the idea. Instead, she supported him in this important personal decision. Phyllis admits she was afraid that the stigma of David’s experience with homelessness would decrease his chances of winning the case.

“People tend to view homelessness as the inability to care for one’s self,” Phyllis laments. “But to go from not having anywhere to live to attending college in a relatively short period of time speaks for itself. This is truly a case of an individual rising to the occasion.”

The judge that heard David’s case agreed that he had proven his self-sufficiency, and in March of 2006, he was granted full custody of his son. That day, Phyllis was by his side—sort of.

She laughs with delight as she recalls the experience. “I dropped David off at court and went scrambling to help him get stuff he needed for the baby. It was such an exciting time.”

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

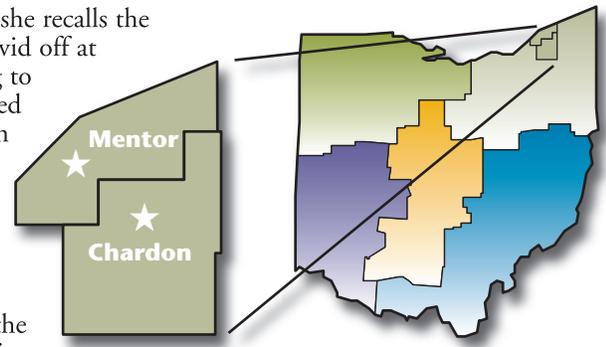
In his pursuit of higher education, David has recruited and maintained the help of many people, proving that there is strength in numbers. He has a team of service providers at NEIGHBORING who continue to rally around him: he still sees his therapist and stays in contact with Phyllis, his case manager. In addition, he also receives support from Lake County Job and Family Services (JFS), which pays for daycare for the two days per week that he attends classes. David’s dedication to school has inspired others to rally around him as well. One of his professors has been so impressed with his degree of self-sufficiency and determination that he recently wrote a letter to JFS on David’s behalf. The letter asks JFS to provide support for more daycare hours to accommodate quiet-study time for David. Phyllis and the other service providers at NEIGHBORING did not know about the letter until they received a copy of it. Phyllis was shocked, and extremely pleased.

“School involves more than just getting to class,” Phyllis says. “David needs time to do his homework. He has to take the baby with him if he goes to the library. But he does it. He has a tremendous amount of perseverance.”

Phyllis has no doubt that David will achieve his dream of working as a paralegal. And she looks forward to the day he approaches graduation and begins to work with a supported-employment specialist to find a job.

“It has been such a joy to work with him over the past two-and-a-half years,” she says. “David has excellent follow-through, and he has demonstrated that he can overcome the odds.”

Nicole Clevenger, BFA, is a peer consultant at the Ohio SE CCOE.



LAKE COUNTY

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Geauga County
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Chardon, Ohio 44024
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“I want to help people however I can to be more independent. If I did things for people that they are capable of doing for themselves, it would be a disservice.”

—Phyllis Wilcox

MARGARITA



Perseverance

—by Nicole Clevenger, BFA

Margarita Gomez was, at one time, virtually paralyzed by depression, but not anymore. Working part time at a restaurant in Lorain County, a renewed Margarita stands in contrast to her former self.

“I love my uniform,” she says through an interpreter of her native Spanish, gesturing as if to smooth her apron and to check her appearance in a mirror. She smiles. “I am a different Margarita in my uniform.” Her pride in this simple ritual of getting dressed for work is striking, given that it can be a chore for some people or even insignificant to others, especially those who struggle with severe depression.

THE REWARDS OF WORK

At the restaurant, Margarita cleans tables and brings bread to the customers, always striving to ensure a pleasant dining experience for the people she serves. While for some people a job is simply a series of completed tasks that provides a paycheck, money is not the main reason Margarita chooses to work. For her, a job brings a sense of purpose, joy, and fellowship with others: it is a way to remain positive about life.

Margarita has made friends at the restaurant, and she is proud of the work she does there. In fact, she enjoys the social interaction and feeling of accomplishment so much that, once, after a week at home during a scheduled two-week vacation, she felt the familiar flatness of her depression begin to take its grip. So she asked to return to work early. Her employer agreed.

“I was feeling depressed and overwhelmed and thinking about everything,” she recalls. “At my job, I feel better. I feel okay. I don’t have my symptoms. My mind has to be prepared for work.”

BACK ON TRACK

Margarita had to quit a previous job a few years ago when she was hospitalized because of her illness. The mental health professionals at the hospital helped her stabilize her symptoms, and since then, a team of providers at The Nord Center in Lorain County (e.g., a psychiatrist, case manager, and supported-employment specialist, among others) has helped her manage her symptoms and continue her recovery.

Her decision to return to work did not come without challenges. Yet, with help, Margarita has overcome every one of them. She has a payee who helps her manage her money and pay her bills. Also, she does not read or write English and, therefore, often relies on others to interpret. However, she does not view this as a barrier: she explains that her struggle with language does not prevent her from doing her job well. Margarita does not drive, but she is able to walk to work with ease because the restaurant is near her apartment. She enjoys the almost daily ritual of walking to and from work.

MARGARITA’S MESSAGE

Margarita wants to share this story with others who may also be struggling on their respective paths to recovery. Her message is never to give up.

“Continue, continue, continue, continue,” she says. “After illness, you have to continue your life. Work will help you.”

Nicole Clevenger, BFA, is a peer consultant at the Ohio SE CCOE. Paul M. Kubek, MA, of the Ohio SE CCOE contributed to this story.



Photo of Margarita by Paul M. Kubek

“At my job, I feel better. I feel okay. I don’t have my symptoms. My mind has to be prepared for work.”

Perseverancia

—por Nicole Clevenger, BFA

En una época, Margarita Gomez se encontraba prácticamente paralizada debido a su depresión, pero esto ya está superado. Margarita, totalmente renovada en comparación con su estado anterior, trabaja tiempo parcial en un restaurante situado en el Condado de Lorain.

“Me encanta mi uniforme,” comenta a través de un intérprete de su idioma natal el español, mientras gesticula como si estuviera alisando su delantal para ver su apariencia reflejada en un espejo. Margarita se sonríe. “Soy una Margarita diferente cuando visto mi uniforme.” Su orgullo con respecto a este simple ritual de vestirse para ir a su trabajo es asombroso, ya que para algunas personas esto es una tarea cotidiana o hasta puede llegar a ser insignificante para otras. Especialmente para aquellas personas que luchan contra un estado depresivo agudo.

LAS RECOMPENSAS QUE LE BRINDA EL TRABAJO

En el restaurante, Margarita limpia las mesas y le trae pan a sus clientes, siempre esforzándose para asegurar que las personas a las que sirve disfruten de una cena placentera. Mientras que para algunas personas un trabajo es simplemente una serie de tareas que deben realizar para recibir un cheque en forma de pago, el dinero no es la razón principal por la cual Margarita opta por trabajar. Para ella, un trabajo le significa tener un norte en la vida, un motivo de júbilo y un sentido de compañerismo —es una razón para mantener una actitud positiva con respecto a la vida.

Margarita ha entablado amistades en el restaurante, y se siente orgullosa del trabajo que desempeña. De hecho, ella disfruta tanto de la interacción social y los logros en su trabajo que, en una ocasión, luego de haber pasado una semana en su casa, durante unas vacaciones de dos semanas que tenía programadas, comenzó a sentir que el abatimiento de la depresión se estaba empezando a apoderar de ella. Para Margarita esto era algo que ya conocía, entonces le pidió a su empleador que le permitiera volver a trabajar antes de lo esperado. Su empleador estuvo de acuerdo.

“Me sentía deprimida y abrumada, y pensaba en todo,” recuerda Margarita. “En mi trabajo, me siento mejor. Me siento bien. No tengo ningún síntoma. Tengo que tener la mente lista para el trabajo.”

ENCAMINÁNDOSE UNA VEZ MÁS

Hace unos años, Margarita debió renunciar a un trabajo que tenía previamente cuando fue hospitalizada debido a su enfermedad. En el hospital, los expertos de salud mental le ayudaron a aliviar sus síntomas, y desde entonces, un grupo de profesionales que presta servicios en ‘The Nord Center’ en el Condado de Lorain (entre ellos, un psiquiatra, un coordinador de casos, y un especialista a cargo de los servicios de apoyo laboral) le han estado ayudando a controlar sus síntomas y a recuperarse.

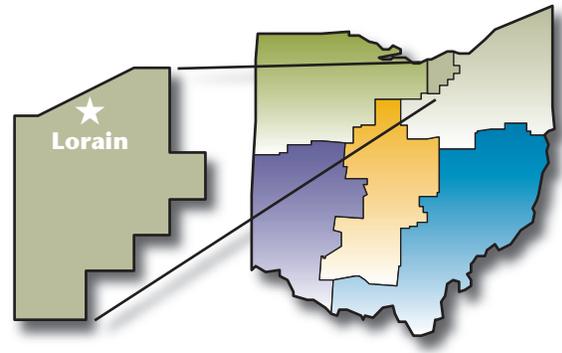
Margarita debió enfrentar ciertos desafíos cuando tomó la decisión de volver a trabajar. Al mismo tiempo, gracias a la ayuda que ha recibido, Margarita ha logrado sobreponerse a cada uno de dichos desafíos. Ella tiene un beneficiario que le ayuda a administrar su dinero y a pagar sus cuentas. También, debido a que ella no habla ni escribe inglés, frecuentemente debe confiar en otras personas que le interpreten. Sin embargo, ella no caracteriza esto como una barrera —Margarita explica que su dificultad con el idioma no le impide tener un buen desempeño en su trabajo. Margarita no sabe conducir un vehículo pero puede ir tranquilamente a su trabajo a pie, ya que el restaurante le queda cerca de su apartamento. Ella disfruta del ritual casi diario de caminar de ida y vuelta a su trabajo.

EL MENSAJE DE MARGARITA

Margarita desea compartir su historia con todas aquellas personas que tal vez estén luchando y se hallen en vías de recuperación. Su mensaje es el de no rendirse jamás.

“Continúen adelante, adelante, adelante,” dice ella. “Después de la enfermedad, hay que continuar viviendo y el trabajo les ayudará.”

Nicole Clevenger, BFA, es asesora paritaria del Ohio SE CCOE. Paul M. Kubek, MA, del Ohio SE CCOE contribuyó a este segmento.



LORAIN COUNTY

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“En mi trabajo, me siento mejor. Me siento bien. No siento ninguno de los síntomas. Mi mente está preparada para trabajar.”



ELIZABETH

Attention to Details

—by Nicole Clevenger, BFA

Henry David Thoreau wrote that everyone marches to the beat of a different drummer, stepping “to the music which he hears however measured or far away.” As the composers of our own life’s music, each of us is charged with the task of arranging the high and low notes of the feelings of our daily experiences in a way that is pleasing and useful to us. This can be challenging, because experiences do not always flow in an easy manner. Rather, they often require us to integrate a wide range of emotional “notes” in the writing of our respective songs.

HARMONY: HAVING DIFFERENT PARTS AGREEABLY RELATED

Elizabeth has a Master of Library and Information Sciences (MLIS) degree from Kent State University in Kent, Ohio. She describes this field as her “calling”. She has always been an investigative person who hungers for information about the world around her. She loves to collect, organize, and share facts. She also has a deep appreciation for music. For her, music provides comfort, catharsis, and a point of connection with others. No matter what happens to her, she always comes back to the music.

Elizabeth currently works from home as an abstractor for the American School Health Association, a job she has held for over two years. Her work requires her to read journal articles about the treatment of adolescents with mental illness and to convert each to a succinct one-page summary. Then, she reduces the summary to a single paragraph, known as an *abstract*, and enters it into a database that is used by library patrons in their search of research materials. All of this work requires a clarity of thought and a level of concentration that, at one time, would have been almost impossible for Elizabeth to achieve and maintain.

DISSONANCE: CLASHING SOUNDS IN A MUSICAL INTERVAL

Elizabeth admits she has struggled with anxiety and depression, strained interpersonal relationships, underdeveloped social skills, and communication difficulties throughout much of her adult life. She has also experienced many losses, including numerous jobs, a marriage, and ties to family and friends.



Photo of Elizabeth by Nicole Clevenger

“I felt it was important not to give up on my dream. I had to deal with my mental illness in tandem with my career goals. I don’t think it would have worked for me to say I am only going to deal with my mental illness and then get a job.”

In 1997, Elizabeth was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, but she refused to let mental illness halt her plans for the future. In 2000, she enrolled in the master's program at Kent State University even as she was struggling with symptoms, which gradually got worse. She remembers spending a lot of money to expand her collection of books and music and finding herself in debt as a result. Her mind was racing. She was thinking too fast, talking too fast, walking too fast, and not concentrating enough to perform adequately at school. The severe manic episode left her without her own residence, without financial stability, and with the feeling of being very much alone.

"Things got jumbled up like a ball of yarn that needs to be untangled," she says. "I felt like I didn't have a friend left in the world."

RHYTHM: REPEATING STRONG AND WEAK ELEMENTS IN A SONG

Elizabeth started her recovery by finding as much information about her diagnosis as possible. She contacted the Students with Disabilities Office at Kent State and with an academic counselor devised a plan to stabilize her grades. She also contacted Coleman Professional Services (CPS), a provider of mental health services in Portage County (see sidebar map). At CPS, she began seeing a psychiatrist, mental health therapist, and a case manager on a regular basis. She describes the comprehensive treatment as thorough and "critical" to her recovery. The treatment team helped her gain control of the rapid cycling of her symptoms and helped her manage her budget and find independent housing.

With her emotional and academic lives stabilized, Elizabeth decided to proceed with her master's thesis, entitled "Anything Goes: Composers with Mental Illness—An Analysis of the Music Library at Kent State University." It was her way of integrating new perspectives on her life in an enjoyable way: she combined her love of music and her experience with and increasing knowledge of mental illness. The thesis also gave her a way to reconnect with her sister, who is a classical musician.

MELODY: AN AGREEABLE ARRANGEMENT OF SOUNDS

In 2004, Elizabeth graduated from Kent State. Her service providers from CPS were in attendance at the ceremony.

"It was the best feeling I had ever known," Elizabeth says. "I got to wear the cap and gown, but I really felt like they were graduating with me."

Although this was a happy time, Elizabeth had some difficulty adjusting to an identity shift

after graduation. She explains that for four years she had spent all of her time and efforts "single-mindedly" focused on her education, which did not provide her with time to deal with other issues, such as social skills, which she needed to succeed in the workforce. She began to feel overwhelmed, and her symptoms began to intensify. Yet, she did not let this stop her from pursuing a career. She began to work closely with a supported-employment specialist at CPS, who helped her prepare for the interview process and encouraged her to apply for her present job.

"I felt it was important not to give up on my dream," Elizabeth says. "I had to deal with my mental illness in tandem with my career goals. I don't think it would have worked for me to say I am only going to deal with my mental illness and then get a job. That may never have happened."

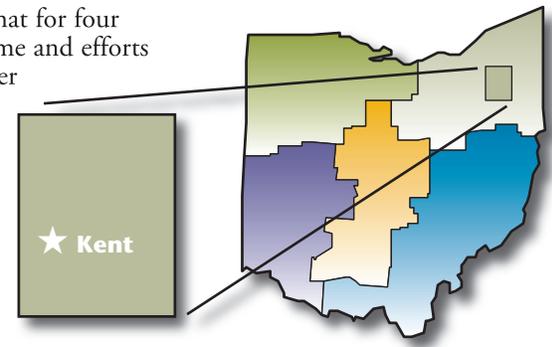
SYMPHONY: A COMPLEX COMPOSITION WITH CONTINUITY

Elizabeth has addressed her need for mental health treatment and employment services by maintaining supportive relationships with service providers at CPS. The therapeutic work has paid off, literally. She maintains an intense focus on her job as an abstractor, and her performance has been noticed by her employer, who recently rewarded her with a substantial raise.

In the past, the bits and pieces of Elizabeth's life felt to her a bit disjointed, like parts of an unfinished song. Today, these experiences feel more cohesive and fulfilling. Evidence of her recovery can be seen in her efforts to advocate not only for herself but for other people who are recovering from mental illness as well. Today, she participates in the Client's Rights Committee and Continuous Improvement Committee at CPS. She is also a member of the Board of Trustees, where she provides a voice for other clients.

Nicole Clevenger, BFA, is a peer consultant at the Ohio SE CCOE.

Editor's Note: Brian Eskridge, BA, was Elizabeth's supported-employment generalist while this story was being written. He contributed information to this story. Brian now works for the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission.



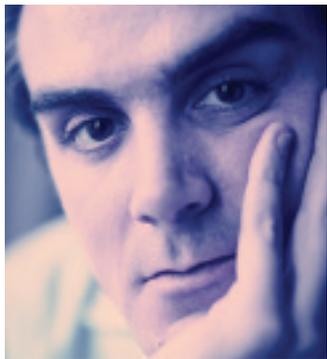
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JOHN



Photodisc/Getty Images

“He (supported-employment generalist) helps me sometimes by not doing anything. He goes to an interview with me, and he will just sit there and not say two words. He lets me do all the talking, which is good, of course, because I can speak for myself.”

Tenacity

—by Nicole Clevenger, BFA

“I can do anything I want,” John says confidently. He speaks with defiance against any doubt that limits his aspirations for the future. Some people may think that John is overestimating his abilities with such a bold statement, but he disagrees.

“If you work hard enough at something, you can make it happen,” he explains. “I don’t think that is being delusional. People prove that every day.”

In the future, John wants to become a published fiction writer, and he continues to hone his craft. In the meantime, he works part time at a fast-food restaurant near Kent, Ohio, a job he enjoys for several reasons. It gives him the opportunity to meet new people, and it also increases the money in his wallet while decreasing his symptoms of depression and anxiety.

IN THE BEGINNING: CONFUSION

John can remember a time when he was not thinking so positively or so clearly. It was junior year in high school. He had episodes of losing concentration that became longer and

more severe as time went on, and he found it increasingly difficult to manage the abundance of thoughts racing through his mind. It was then that he was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder. He was hospitalized twice during this difficult period, which forced his absence for most of his senior year. He finished high school with the help of a tutor.

John sought help for his illness from Coleman Professional Services in Portage County. There, he began to work with a psychiatrist and attend a day-treatment program. As he felt stronger, he began to think about getting a degree, and he enrolled in some writing classes at Kent State University. He eventually withdrew from the University due to complications from his illness, and for months, he spent more than 15 hours per day writing alone at home—an activity which has sustained him throughout the turbulence of the last few years.

A RECOVERY RELATIONSHIP

Although John was busy with his writing, he was unhappy spending so much time alone. He knew a job could help him begin to remedy this loneliness, so he sought the help of employment services at Coleman in order to find work. This is when John met Supported-Employment Generalist Brian Eskridge*, BA. The two have built a relationship that gives John the assurance he needs to move forward.

Today, John describes his job as a “lifesaver”, and he readily accepts the challenges at work in place of the “nothingness” he experienced while unemployed.

“The nice thing about Brian is that I can talk to him about a lot of things,” says John. “I am not afraid of what he might say. I trust him.”

This trust is built from Brian’s compassion and his understanding of John’s illness, work preferences, and life-struggles. There is mutual respect, which John finds comforting. In fact, John feels so at ease that he has asked Brian to accompany him to most job interviews. In order to protect his own privacy, John has simply told prospective employers that Brian is a friend who checks in with him from time to time.

John describes Brian as a quiet, unassuming person who offers encouragement in a way that is not overbearing. In fact, he says that one of the best ways Brian supports him is by just being there in person. Brian visits John at home often to provide face-to-face guidance and motivation and his presence has a calming effect when John is feeling anxious, especially before and during job interviews. He guides John to his own conclusions. For example, on the morning of the interview for his current job, John was feeling nervous. He had a headache and his confidence was shaky. He expressed doubts, questioning whether or not it was a good idea to try working, but true to his nature, Brian did not offer an “I agree” or “I disagree” kind of answer. He simply asked John what he thought was the right answer. After reflecting for a moment, John concluded that a job might offer him some relief from his symptoms and get him out of the house, if nothing else.

“Brian told me that I just answered my own question,” John recollects with a slight chuckle. “Brian has a way of doing that. He helps me sometimes by not doing anything. He goes to an interview with me, and he will just sit there and not say two words. He lets me do all the talking, which is good, of course, because I can speak for myself.”

So, with renewed enthusiasm, John proceeded to the interview, taking Brian along with him. Ultimately, he was hired.

Today, John describes his job as a “lifesaver”, and he readily accepts the challenges at work in place of the “nothingness” he experienced while unemployed. Working with Brian and the other mental health providers at Coleman has helped John maintain a positive focus, and he has learned not to anticipate a worst-case scenario about the challenges he faces in his life. These skills have enabled John to adjust to new situations and people.

“You know, when you finally get to work, half of your fears disappear altogether,” John says. “The other half, you find, are manageable.”

NO SUCH THING AS FAILURE

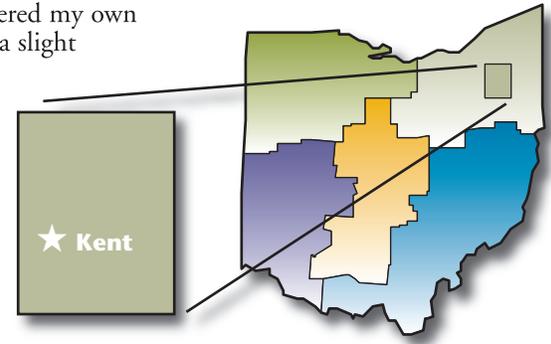
John believes that his recovery will be a life-long journey. He views himself as a work-in-progress and his employment as an exciting evolution, never losing sight of his long-term goal to become a writer. He notes that some of his family and friends have referred to the stops and starts in his journey as failures, but he strongly disagrees. He tells the story of Thomas Edison, who made numerous attempts to create one successful light bulb.

“At a press conference, someone asked Edison why he kept on after he failed two-thousand times,” John says. “Edison replied that he didn’t fail; he just found two-thousand ways not to make a light bulb.”

John laughs. He makes this point: Edison proved that the only real failure is the failure to keep trying.

Nicole Clevenger, BFA, is a peer consultant at the Ohio SE CCOE.

**Editor’s Note: Brian Eskridge, BA, was John’s supported-employment generalist while this story was being written. He now works for the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission.*



PORTAGE COUNTY

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Supported Employment is effective because its core principles encourage professional behavior that produces a social environment which enables everyone involved—service providers, employers, consumers, family members—to build safe, trusting, long-term relationships. It is these relationships that promote and support positive personal change. And it is the accumulation of these personal changes that creates large-scale social transformation over time.

Seven Core Principles

Supported Employment (SE) is the evidence-based practice that helps people with mental illness find competitive jobs in their local communities with rapid job-search and placement services.

There are seven core principles that make the SE model different from traditional vocational programs. The principles are briefly described below. Research has demonstrated that these principles produce positive consumer outcomes and improved program and service-system outcomes.

1. ZERO EXCLUSION POLICY

All consumers who want to work are eligible for help, even if they

- Have experienced job loss in the past;
- Lose a job(s) while enrolled in SE;
- Are still experiencing symptoms of mental illness;
- Are still using alcohol or other drugs*;
- Have problems with transportation;
- Do not know how to fill out an application;
- Do not know how to talk to an employer;
- Do not have previous training;
- Are afraid they might not learn the job fast enough; or
- Are afraid they might not fit in with others.

**The use of alcohol and other drugs may limit consumer job choices because many employers test for drug use. If consumers can pass a drug test, their choices of jobs typically increase.*

2. CONSUMER PREFERENCES ARE IMPORTANT

The mental health case manager and supported-employment specialist help each consumer identify his or her personal strengths, skills, and interests. These are excellent motivators. Consumers who find jobs that they want experience a higher level of satisfaction and tend to keep their jobs longer. The case manager and employment specialist are trained to give as much or as little help as the consumer wants.

3. RAPID JOB SEARCH

Once a consumer expresses the desire to work, his or her case manager will contact the employment specialist. In two to three weeks, the specialist may be helping the consumer research jobs, fill out applications, and interview with potential employers. The case manager will also contact a benefits counselor. Research shows that fewer people obtain employment when their job search is delayed. The SE service model does not require consumers to complete lengthy pre-employment assessment, training, and workshops.

4. A COMPETITIVE JOB IS THE GOAL

The employment specialist is committed to helping each consumer find a regular part-time or full-time job in the community that pays minimum wage or more. A regular job is a competitive job that anyone in the community can apply for. The SE model only endorses competitive jobs for several reasons:

- Consumers like competitive jobs more than they like sheltered work.
- Competitive jobs reduce stigma by enabling consumers to work side-by-side with people who may not be experiencing mental disabilities.
- Competitive jobs inspire self-esteem.
- Consumers want to live in the mainstream of life.

5. EMPLOYMENT IS INTEGRATED WITH MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Employment specialists are included in service-team meetings, and they work closely with case managers, psychiatrists, and other professionals to help consumers achieve their employment goals. Team members openly discuss and find solutions for clinical issues that affect work performance, such as the following:

- Medication side effects (e.g., drowsiness)
- Persistent symptoms (e.g., hallucinations)
- Cognitive difficulties (e.g., problem-solving skills)
- Other rehabilitation needs (e.g., social skills)

6. TIME-UNLIMITED SUPPORT

Some consumers need support over long periods of time. Therefore, consumers are never terminated from SE services, unless they request it.

7. PERSONALIZED BENEFITS PLANNING

Benefits counselors help consumers calculate exactly how much money they can make at their jobs without disrupting benefits, such as Medicaid insurance, supplemental security income (SSI), and social security disability insurance (SSDI). Benefits counselors advise consumers and caregivers about the following:

- Benefits requirements
- Income ceilings
- Work incentives
- Other issues and regulations related to employment benefits



Photodisc/Getty Images



Resources

Deborah R. Becker and Robert E. Drake, MD (2003). *A Working Life for People with Severe Mental Illness*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.

SAMHSA Supported Employment Toolkit

www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/communitysupport/toolkits/employment



CENTER FOR EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES



OUR MISSION

The Center for Evidence-Based Practices (CEBP) at Case Western Reserve University is a technical-assistance organization that promotes knowledge development and the implementation of evidence-based practices for the treatment and recovery of people diagnosed with mental illness or co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorders. The CEBP also implements and studies emerging best practices in an effort to identify innovations that consistently generate improved outcomes and, thus, may become an EBP. The CEBP provides these services:



- Service-systems consultation
- Program/organizational-change consultation
- Clinical consultation
- Training and education
- Program evaluation (fidelity and outcomes)
- Professional peer-networks
- Research

CCOES

The CEBP functions as an umbrella entity for two State of Ohio Coordinating Center of Excellence (CCOE) initiatives. Both CCOEs share resources and work cooperatively.

Ohio SE CCOE

The Ohio Supported Employment Coordinating Center of Excellence disseminates strategies for increasing competitive employment among people diagnosed with mental illness.

Ohio SAMI CCOE

The Ohio Substance Abuse and Mental Illness Coordinating Center of Excellence disseminates strategies that address co-occurring mental and substance use disorders.

This booklet is part of an evolving training and consultation process from the CEBP and it's Ohio SE CCOE initiative. It is written for consumers of mental health services, as well as for potential employers, family members, and community advocates. It is also written for policy makers, administrators, and service providers who want to implement and sustain the SE model.

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Share the News

We invite and encourage you to make copies of this publication and distribute it widely. We hope it supports your efforts to advocate for evidence-based practices in your community. A free high-resolution PDF of this publication may be obtained from our web site (see "Resources" in right column).

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Editor's Note: The people featured in this booklet were all asked to choose how their names would appear in print and whether they wanted their photo to appear or not. The options were presented as a way to respect their preferences for privacy and publicity. Some people chose to use their first and last names while others chose to use their first name only or requested that we use a fictitious name. Many chose for us to print their actual photos but some preferred that we use a stock photo from a photo library. We thank each person for taking the time to share these stories of recovery.

PUBLIC-ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIP

The CEBP is a partnership between the **Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences** at Case Western Reserve University and the **Department of Psychiatry** at the Case School of Medicine. The partnership collaborates with and is supported by the following:

- Ohio Department of Mental Health
- Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services
- Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission
- Ohio Department of Health

RECOVERY STORIES

For more stories about the positive impact of work upon mental-health and/or substance-abuse recovery, visit this page on our web site:

www.centerforebp.case.edu/recoverystories

THE NATIONAL SCENE

Supported Employment, the evidence-based practice, was created and is studied by researchers at the Dartmouth Psychiatric Research Center (PRC) of Dartmouth Medical School. SE is also known as Individual Placement & Support (IPS).

The PRC has provided leadership for national implementation of SE with the Johnson & Johnson-Dartmouth Community Mental Health Program. The State of Ohio is participating in this national effort with technical assistance from the CEBP and its Ohio SE CCOE initiative.



RESOURCES

To obtain additional printed copies of this booklet or a free PDF, consult the order form on our web site:

www.centerforebp.case.edu/resources/workisrecovery.html

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