

Themes of Recovery

Themes common to those who have recovered or have shown significant progress in recovery from mental illness:

- Believing that recovery is happening
- Having one's thoughts understood by others
- Being with people one can trust
- Having a voice in one's community
- Taking care of oneself
- Creating purpose in one's life by helping others who are experiencing the pain of mental illness.
- Having hope about what can be done
- Understanding what happens as a result of one's behavior
- Expressing one's emotional and spiritual side

Adapted from *KEN Bulletin*, Volume 3, Number 1

Recovering and proud of it!

Existence feels thick, too thick to move through. The shades on the windows are pulled down, and I don't answer the knock at the door; I don't want to see anyone. In the mirror, my face is gaunt, with dark circles under hollow eyes. I haven't slept well for weeks, not since this latest bout with depression set in. I feel like I have always been this way, like I always will be...



By Kevin Jenkins,
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My name is Kevin Jenkins. I am forty-eight years old, and a few years ago I was diagnosed with recurring major depression and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). I have lived with the symptoms of these illnesses since my early teens. I share my story wanting to shed some light on mental illness, and to offer the hope of recovery.

What causes mental illness is uncertain; however, it is currently believed to be a combination of genetic predisposition and environmental factors, such as prolonged stress, or trauma. There are other considerations as well. OCD has been linked, in some cases, to streptococcus infections (strep throat). As a child I was prone to such infections.

Over the years, these illnesses have caused significant disruption in my life, including the loss of jobs, failure to complete my graduate work at college, and rifts in my personal relationships. I have been, at times, suicidal, and yet I did not begin to seek help until I was well into my forties.

In our society, mental illness has historically been seen as shameful. It has been covered up, locked away, and denied. The result of this belief has been the stigmatization of persons who live with mental illness.

When a person is believed to be somehow inferior, or faulted, our expectations for that person are lowered. Imagine if that person were a child, or young person. When the stigma is internalized, that child will live up to, or down to, to those expectations. This is also true of adults living with a disorder. The stigma of mental illness can cause as much, if not more, injury to a person's development as the illness itself. We must bring mental illness out of the closet and into the light if we are to make true recovery possible. When I was forty-two years old I finally decided to seek help.

At San Luis Valley Comprehensive Community Mental Health Center, I found a team of people who would support my recovery. There was a psychiatrist who worked with me to find the right combination of medicines to help quiet my mind.

There was also a psychiatric nurse, who was a great source of information. She signed me up for a program that supplied my medication, at no cost, until I was able to get back on my feet. And there was my counselor, who gave me the tools to reduce the symptoms of the illnesses, and helped me look at, and change, my beliefs and behaviors that were prohibiting my recovery.

The rest was up to me.

Recovery is, for me, an ongoing process. It is the work of managing the symptoms of the illnesses, and of creating, and living, a meaningful life. There are days when I have setbacks; but I no longer dwell there. I have learned to break the cycle of escalation. I am now able to focus on my family, my friends, my work, and whatever the future brings.

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- Kevin Jenkins