

After being diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 2001, and learning more about the illness, I realized that I had suffered from it all of my life, and understood how I ended up on a path of self-destruction.

While growing up, I was always criticized for my high energy, and made fun of for my periods of sadness. I enjoyed being energetic, but could never understand or explain why I would become sad or depressed. My high energy frightened people, and they would avoid me when I would be in my down moods. Though I did not use drugs in high school, my parents and the school counselor accused me of using speed. As a result, my self-esteem lowered. In my twenties, I sought help from my physician for depression. I was given anti-depressives, which did not seem to help. I felt alone and misunderstood. I began doing drugs to escape reality, and to find some sort of solace within myself. For the next 15 years, I tried to escape life through crack cocaine. It took me to places I never thought I would go: insanity, homelessness, rehabs and jail.

My life changed in 2001, when I was rescued from myself by a county program that worked with clients with mental illness, who were in the criminal justice system. The program connected me with county mental health, and I was diagnosed and treated with proper medication. At the same time, I entered and completed a program to address my addiction. Today, I have 13 years of recovery with my mental health treatment and addiction, and have been free from the criminal justice system. My life has never been better, and I am truly grateful.

Being able to “Give back,” and inspire others, is what gives me hope.

-Theresa, East Palo Alto



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