THE CATALYST

A diagnosis does not stop me from following my dreams

By: Tami Stransky-Afriat | Posted: April 13, 2022

My name is Tami.

I was diagnosed with schizophrenia in 1996. I struggled because I couldn't find stable employment until four years ago. This is because as a schizophrenic, I was not seen for who I really am and what I can do. I feel that we are seen as incapable and as dangerous. But I am a wife and a mother, and I am now self-employed. I found my way!

I wish to help those in my situation find hope when they are first diagnosed with a mental disorder. We are often diverted into volunteerism and not encouraged to work, because social norms make it seem like people with mental illness don't deserve to work and make money. My husband's family told him to leave me at the start of our marriage because I was only a volunteer. I was being pushed to volunteer by certain organizations who promised me paid work. But they were empty promises they made that I would get paid. I was admitted to the hospital because of the pressures of family and the situation.

There is a way out. Now.

Back then, there wasn't any hope, but now there is. Society has slowly begun to accept mental illness. We can speak out and be heard and recognized as someone who is capable.

I started driving an Uber 4 years ago and I feel like I am contributing to society and my family respects me. My husband is proud of me!

I also invented a mood band. It changes colour when temperature changes are indicating anxiety or depression, and then the wearer snaps the band across the skin, grounding them. This method is Pavlovian. Anxiety is associated with colour and to calm down, you snap the band. And it is a distraction. On the band it says STOP SNAP BREATHE.

I also wrote a book which I am getting out to the public called "Put me in a box: how I learned to be crazy". It is a raw and candid account of my journey with anorexia when I was a teen and later on, my battle with schizophrenia.

You too can follow your dreams and hope for the stars!

Author: Tami Stransky-Afriat

Mental Health Commission of Canada
https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/
350 Albert Street, Suite 1210 Ottawa ON K1R 1A4
Tel: 613.683.3755 | Fax: 613.798.2989
mhccinfo@mentalhealthcommission.ca