



Tuesday, 28 April 2009 18:08



Can you imagine being at the prime of your life, age 33, with a successful husband, a comfortable life style, a meaningful teaching career, two precious children and a beautiful co-op with an incredibly giving support system to complete this perfect picture?

Digg

submit

Pat Feinberg

Then, can you imagine all of this being taken away from you right before your eyes? Well I don't have to imagine because it happened to me. It happened to me when depression pulled me into its deep, dark abyss. Although most of my life was centered around the helping profession, I now found myself on the other side of the equation. I was the one needing help. I lost everything that was near and dear to me.

Work was a place for the healing to begin. A place to pick up the pieces. Work has been an integral part of my recovery. Work defines me. When you are at a party and someone asks the inevitable question "What do you do?" you have an answer – whether it is volunteer work, transitional employment or supported employment. Work is therapeutic, it increases our self esteem. It provides structure for our day and gives us a place to go. Work allows us to be part of the mainstream and provides a social network for us. Lastly, but certainly not the least, there is an economic advantage.

Venture House, an innovative clubhouse with a strong work focus, became a way to reinvent myself. Clubhouses share the belief that work is an integral part of the recovery process. Consumers and staff work side by side doing the jobs necessary to run the clubhouse such as answering phones, preparing meals, entering data, and working on creative and educational projects, such as the literary magazine and newsletter. Volunteering in this setting was the first step in my journey back to work. Peers and staff together created an environment that helped me believe in myself again and reconnect with my employment goals. Transitional employment opportunities and the support given by staff and members helped me to learn the ins and outs of my work. Job coaches used a hands-on approach to break down tasks into small steps. In the early stages of my recovery, the mere presence of having support "walk by my side" made all the difference for me. Equally important, the emotional support they provided helped to restore my confidence in renegotiating the subways and made it easier to approach new situations, which, in turn, helped me to be successful at work. At the end of the day, having someone who consistently believed in my ability to recover was the most important thing of all. For me, transitional employment was a good way to "test the waters" considering I had been out of the workforce for awhile and had a large gap in my work history.

After having completed a number of transitional employment jobs, the next step of my journey involved supported employment where I was hired as a regular employee in the real world for competitive pay! This brings me to my current job at the Coalition where supports are individualized and can be offered on or off site to help me maintain my responsibilities. Consistent support is provided by my colleagues, whether in the form of assistance with organization, prioritization of tasks, or encouragement to help me "raise the bar" and evolve beyond my regular responsibilities. Their understanding and accommodations have helped me weather the good times and the bad times. Of course, my own determination played an important role in my success as well.

One particularly helpful work incentive is a subsidy that reduces my gross earning – on paper – below the SGA level. It allows me to receive my pay as well as my disability benefits. This subsidy represents a mathematical translation of the assistance I receive above and beyond the scope of my job. A subsidy exists where the work schedule is flexible, with shorter hours and more breaks. It also is characterized by extra help and/or supervision, explicit directions, as well as counseling, as needed.

Another incredibly valuable work incentive is the Medicaid Buy-In (MBI) program which allows me to work

and retain my medical coverage. I was one of the very first to enroll in the MBI in 2003. The knowledge that I can work and continue to receive my disability benefits, as well as keep my medical coverage, has played an important role in my life. Very few individuals are aware of this program, and it remains one of the best kept secrets in NYC. In fact, there is even a lack of knowledge about this work incentive program among both providers and consumers of mental health services. In response, the Coalition's Center for Rehabilitation and Recovery has developed a Benefits Management Training that incorporates information about the MBI Program. Margie Staker and I co-facilitate the training.

My current success is further enhanced by my participation in the psycho-social clubhouse, New Challenges Community Center of Transitional Services for New York, which has very accommodating programming for the working individual. These unique programs that I am a part of include: a walking group, yoga, Latin dance and a disc-jockey workshop. I have become a true Renaissance woman!

In the end, I've discovered that my challenges, as well as my accomplishments, have helped me to find my sense of strength, enabled me to take more risks, and influenced me to become a more independent person. In a few short years, my role at the Coalition has evolved from clerical worker to one of co-trainer. In this new role, I have the opportunity to give back to others and to put a face behind the statement that recovery is possible. I represent a living example of work incentives being put into practice. My intention is to offer hope and to pass on the gift of inspiration that has so generously been given to me.

Pat Feinberg is Administrative Assistant/Peer Educator at The Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies, Inc.

Add this page to your favorite Social Bookmarking websites



Comments

B *i* u Quote Code List List item URL

Name *

Email (For verification & Replies)

URL

Code

Ks7nUW

ChronoComments by [Joomla Professional Solutions](#)

Submit Comment