

Peer Perspective October 2021

I was a preschool teacher for 10 years and I loved every minute of it. I am honored to have had a hand in laying the foundation of education for over 500 children. What a tremendous responsibility! I was a well-oiled machine, waking up, accomplishing what needed to be done, and most importantly, I felt “Normal.”

My mental health slowly declined over the next 10 years. Friends and loved ones around me noticed I was drinking more and making poor choices for my life. I was always angry and felt numb. The minute they approached me about their concerns, I denied that I had a problem and carried on as usual.

My world flipped upside down in 2016 and I was hospitalized and diagnosed with my first mental illness. I felt frustrated, defeated, hopeless, but worst of all, broken. I tried the whole therapy thing and reached out to a few therapists only to walk away feeling more confused and hopeless than when I started. It wasn't until I attended a day treatment program that my vision became more and more clear. I was working hard by attending regularly and reading every self-help book that came my way. I uncovered years of suppressed emotions -But- something was still missing.

My end goal was to feel normal again. The concept of “normal” became a roadblock. Over the last several years I have learned the recovery journey rarely gets us back to “Normal.” If we are willing, recovery takes us on amazing adventures. We can acquire helpful tips and tricks that we can practice along the way. I can remember the lessons that were so gently demonstrated and modeled along the way which helps us get back up when we slip or fall. Good days or bad days.

My mental health journey has taught me this, “Normal is just a setting on the washing machine.” My past shaped me into the human I am today. I am not normal. I endured situations that no-one should experience AND because of that experience I can confidently proclaim that I am resilient and proud of the person I am today. I am grateful for all I have survived because it led me to become a Peer Support Specialist AND I wouldn't want it any other way.

- Shannon, Certified Peer Support Specialist, CMMHC