

(The following Success Story is the first in an ongoing series. Each quarter we will share stories of people who have overcome obstacles and serve as an inspiration to others through hope, courage, and determination)

TJ Maynard: A Story of Overcoming

I had gravel in my guts, and I didn't need anyone's help for anything. But my behavior had become erratic. I made some bad decisions and landed in prison. I got out in three years, but still had no healthy way to manage my mental health; I began self-medicating with drugs. It was like I was a plane going into a tailspin. I was addicted, out of control, and to top it off my own family had rejected me and was ashamed of me. So ashamed that my mother told me I'd wasted my life and I was nothing but a junkie, a deadbeat, a loser.

But I felt I had a strength, a drive, a perseverance inside of me that I hadn't yet actualized. And in a strange way, my mother's words moved me. I was going to prove her wrong, I was going to prove my old life wrong. I was going to kick my addiction and triumph over my illness.

I applied to Delta College and got into their honors program. I wanted to grow mentally, emotionally, socially. I was possessed by a singular goal to improve myself and I earned an Associates in two years, graduated with honors, and all that time I'd been clean - straight as an arrow. I felt like I'd come out of my tailspin and was flying again.

But that's not the end of the story - after I graduated, I lost my direction and relapsed into addiction. I was flat broke and ended up in an institution. I was diagnosed with bipolar and anxiety disorders and based on these diagnoses I was put on Disability Insurance. I was released from the institution, found a place to stay, but wasn't working, wasn't doing anything. I wanted to work, but I relied on Disability Insurance to help pay bills while I recovered. I even told a friend about my desire to work, and he said "man, if you go back to work, you'll lose your disability." It reinforced the idea that I couldn't work, so I didn't try. I didn't even consider it. All I did was sit around and watch the news and get high with my neighbor, and that was the cycle - for years. Wake up. Get high. Watch TV. Repeat. I got high just to escape the boredom. It became an endless, numbing cycle that only brought dark thoughts, apathy, depression, suicidal tendencies. But I ached for something. I thought about the thrill of college and desperately wanted that back. I wanted to use my education to get a job, to earn money, to find some success, some hope, some way to survive, to thrive, to break the radio static monotony my life had become. I'd gone back into a tailspin, and crash landed in an ocean of mixed waters - desire and depression, and I was drowning in both.

I swallowed my pride and reached out for help. I told my therapist about my desire to work, and she hooked me up with Supported Employment at SCCMHA. She assured me that Supported Employment could help me find a job that was a good fit for me. I was still dabbling in drugs and trying to quit, but unsuccessfully. I was scared about what could happen to my benefits, but I met with a Benefit to Work Coach at CMH, and he helped me understand my benefits - I learned that if I worked, I could make more money and get ahead financially.

Supported Employment helped me update my resume, apply for jobs, and prepare for interviews. When I started working, I found I loved it. It gave me energy and confidence - this was the "something" that I'd been missing -having responsibility gave my life meaning and purpose.

With this new motivation I tried to quit drugs again. I doubled down on my recovery strategies and quit hanging around with the people in my life who were bad influences. I reconciled with my family. I had a good job and good people in my life that supported me. I was introduced to positive, productive people who challenged me in good ways to keep improving my life. I haven't touched drugs since.

Supported Employment helped me get a new job in 2022. I feel accomplished and feel I've earned the respect of my peers. I don't feel like a leech you know. There's times people need a hand, and I got mine, but there came a time when I needed to move beyond that. I used to think that I couldn't work, but now I can't not work. It's part of who I am. Sometimes I look back on decisions I made and think, it's not a mistake if you learn from it. I'll be the first to admit I've traveled a broken road, but I learned from my negative experiences, and my life is better for it.

Since I got clean, I channel my energy into good interests. I took up the guitar, something I loved playing when I was young but lost it when my life was in a fog. I have extra income to buy guitar accessories, and I love to play my own music. I've grown personally because of the job, I've grown musically, and I've grown socially. Before, when I was using it, nobody respected my opinion or cared about what I had to say. Now, I can have open conversations about hobbies, interests, politics, and people listen to me.

Ultimately, despite my struggles, my job has drastically improved my quality of life, my physical health, my mental health, my family ties, and my community connections.

~TJM