



My Experience Working for a Small Organization

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My experience with Calumet County began in 2010 when I spoke at a Comprehensive Community Services (CCS) Workshop where I told my recovery story from Schizo-Affective Disorder and alcohol abuse. At the time, I had a partner whose teen daughter committed suicide and we were a team. I set up a website and targeted various organizations for presentations. Among the places visited were Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, Calumet County and Winnebago County. Although most of our work was not rewarded financially, I had an idea in the back of my mind when I met county staff. I was waiting to be trained as a Certified Peer Specialist (CPS) and I always stated this goal and desire to be employed. At the Calumet County workshop, I met my future supervisor, Kathleen McCarthy. We communicated well and I began to market myself. When I told her of the pending training, she expressed a desire to intern me. From that point, I had a goal and that was to work as a team member with Calumet County.

While I was awaiting training, Kathleen contacted me again and asked me if I would be interested in speaking to the county board by telling them my story. My willingness to share did not go unnoticed and the Director of Human Services led the

board meeting. I gave a 110% presentation effort both times and it impressed Calumet County.

I kept in distant contact with Kathleen via e-mail and informed her when I began and completed my training. NAMI- Fox Valley, who trained me through the Consumers as Providers (CAP) program agreed to provide liability insurance for the internship and a start date was chosen. That was June, 2012. After completing my internship, there was no spot for a CPS due to budgetary reasons. Shortly after, in October, I was contracted by Outagamie County to work in their Community Support Program (CSP), CCS program and their Mental Health Court (MHC). They were very happy with me, but I found the larger bureaucracy to be impersonal, very fast paced and not nearly as rewarding as my internship with the smaller, semi-rural county had been. Two weeks later, there was a personnel change at Calumet County and a knowledgeable person was needed fast. I jumped at the chance. As of November 1, 2012, I was working under a contract for both counties. After 5 months, I made a decision to work exclusively for Calumet County mainly as part of their CSP team, but also as part of the CCS team. I have never regretted my decision.

As a team member, I found the staff to be very accepting and eager to hear my opinions and impressions. I had earned their respect. We all are very close and our team consists of a psychiatrist, registered nurse, supervisor, social worker and peer support specialist. I provide a perspective that is unique to others on the team. My perspective is from an individual in recovery from alcohol abuse and mental illness. I not only live the experience of mental illness, but also had the formal professional training in

the peer specialist model of mental health supports. We all share our lives by social networking, celebrating birthdays and by me hosting an annual fish fry at my home. I am an avid outdoorsman and I take pride in my abilities. I am always eager to host the fish fry. Everyone brings a dish and it is a nice team building exercise.

As a CPS, I have had many rewarding experiences with the peers I work with. The most rewarding experience came when a client's auditory hallucinations began to instruct him to harm me. The voices were saying, "John has to die". Of course we took this very seriously and I had another staff member join me on our weekly visits for about 1 month. The staff took turns with this process and when I felt comfortable enough, I began working with him alone again. Since that time, we have reached a very healthy relationship in which I do not feel threatened in any way.

Working with my supervisor has always been positive as well. She is very thoughtful, appreciative and open minded. We communicate and work well together. If any issues arise, we acknowledge them and move forward in a constructive way. At first we had supervision sessions weekly; but now that I have more experience, we meet bi-weekly. My supervisor challenges me with providing me with individuals whom I can work with effectively and allow me to think creatively in the provision of services.

In conclusion, I have found that working for a small organization is much more personal and rewarding. I am allowed to have days off when needed and I am paid adequately. I definitely feel valued and appreciated. In fact, I have found this employment experience the most positive one I have ever had. In short, I turned my disability into a rewarding career.