

April 22, 2022.

I am honored to be able to share my story in the hope that I can reach out to others who have or are currently struggling with mental health and or substance abuse issues.

In September 2021, I graduated from the Kitsap County Behavioral Health Court Program. Looking back and comparing myself to who I was before and who I am now, I can honestly say from a mental health outlook, I have a unique perspective on many things that used to occupy the front of my mind on a continues basis. I am currently 61 years old. From my early twenties to now I suffered from a great deal of anxiety and depression. It wasn't until I was 54 years old when I was diagnosed with acute anxiety and chronic depression, that diagnosis along with dealing with peripheral neuropathy which left me in a chronic state of nerve pain 24/7. I was forced to retire early with a disability.

During a substantial portion of my life, I always lived in fear that something bad was going to happen. I was the person in my family that was relied upon to be the "fixer" When I was 16, I lost my brother due to a violent car accident. The death of my brother had a traumatic effect on my parents. By the time I was 18 my parents were relying on me to virtually run the household duties. When I was 24, my late sister was involved in a domestic violent related divorce which eventually she too relied upon me for financial as well as emotional support. I was not aware of it at the time, but much as of this was adding already to the mental health pressures that were building inside of me.

During the next 20 years I found myself involved in committing several crimes that were financially related, such as identity theft. During that period, I was the person in my family that they would go to for financial help for assorted reasons. I was constantly striving for approval from myself and others but since I always set grand expectations for myself, I always ended up overwhelming not only others but myself as well leading to constant disappointments and really bullying myself because I was not satisfied with my efforts.

Approximately 3 years, I found myself involved in the legal system again, this time I was looking at 20 months (about 1 and a half years) in prison. During the pre-trial work, my attorney discussed with me the Behavioral health court program and wanted to know if I had heard of such as program. He gave me the basic run down of the program and while nothing was guaranteed he felt I might be a viable candidate and so the paperwork to get things started was done.

In August 2020, I was accepted into the program. The phase 1 portion of my journey was about to begin. I remember my first few weeks of the program I had a mind full of mixed emotions. I was starting to learn the requirements that were needed to be completed before I was going to be able to graduate 18 months later. One of the requirements that was number 1 on the courts list was that I was going to have to seek therapy and be able to get a handle on my mental health issues that had taken up well over half of my adult life. Another challenge I was facing was how mentally I was going to comfortably fit into a room of other program candidates that were at least at the time over half of my age, and most of them were dealing with various substance abuse type issues. The last item that I was facing was going to have to stand up in front of everyone and air out at times my personal demons that for a substantial portion of my life, not even my wife or kids were aware of.

As the program continued, I was slowly learning that it wasn't just me that wanted to successfully complete the program, the entire BHCT clearly was a team concept, and they were proving every week that they were behind each one of us. There was one day that for me helped me define the program and what it meant for everyone in that court room.

That day, an individual was having to face being sanctioned by the Judge Claire Bradley for violating some part of their program. During this time, the Judge was showing the individual empathy, patience, and some understanding while this individual was coming apart emotionally trying to explain themselves. At the end, this individual was indeed sanctioned, if I recall had to go back to county jail for 30 days. However, what has stuck in my mind all this time, was how the Judge dealt with this person. Judge Bradley very clearly and patiently discussed with this person what was going to happen going forward. After 30 days she was going to reappear in front of the judge, with a plan as to how she was going to go forward and with an explanation as to why the court should allow her back in the program.

It was at that moment for me, the team demonstrated how the court wanted everyone to succeed, they would give you the tools to make that happened, however you had to stand and look in the mirror and constantly remind yourself why are there and what you are going to do to make sure you graduate, because the team is going to be at the end of the finish line cheering you on.

I proudly graduated from the Kitsap County District Court Behavioral Health Court Program, (without sanctions) in September 2021.

The mental health court program helped me keep a balance in my life. They made me hold myself accountable for the challenges that I faced, without them doing that I would never have sought out mental health therapy. It is important to note that as of this letter I am still attending therapy, I no longer keep things bottled up inside of me. Most importantly I no longer have the weight of my family's challenges constantly weighing on my shoulders.

Thank You

Jeffery G