

# ADVOCATES

## COURT REPORT

ADVOCATES FOR GRAFTON COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH COURT

## From Knowing Everything to Asking for Help

After a serious fight with his mom's boyfriend, who went to the police, Kyle turned himself in. "This incident sparked a need to find a different way," Kyle recalled. "I didn't know what was wrong, but I didn't feel good about where I was headed."

While initial assessments were ambiguous and ranged from "nothing wrong" to major depression, Kyle was eventually given a diagnosis of Bipolar 2.



Kyle  
and  
his  
girl-  
friend  
Kylie

"This began to make sense," he said, "it helped explain the fights and the anger that seemed to come out of nowhere."

He was also a teenager who, in his own words, "was playing too fast, was insecure, and thought I knew everything."

What little he remembers of his childhood felt chaotic, he said, and was probably the reason he had behavior issues in school. "But I always liked learning new skills and information."

Being accepted into the alternative sentencing program, Plymouth Mental Health Court (PMHC) meant that Kyle would not be serving jail time. Instead, he would be assigned a case manager and a therapist and would appear in PMHC once a month. It also meant he could keep his job as a restaurant cook and could accept the support that his family offered.

In the courtroom Kyle relaxed when the judge asked how he was doing, and how the last month had gone for him. "It was so different from regular court, where everyone is so anxious and the answers to questions are yes or no. In PMHC, all program participants attended together and we were able to explain our lives to the judge." Judge Melissa Vetanze especially influenced Kyle. "She was demanding but she was very instructive and I knew she cared," he emphasized.

Kyle also credits Shelly Golden, the GCMHC Coordinator, "who warms everyone's heart when she walks into a room," and his case manager, Sarah, "who made sure I got the services I needed." For most of his two and a half years in the program, Kyle saw a therapist once a week and he continues to see her once every month or two, as needed. "She has never let me off easily," he says, "but that's a good thing!"

"Shelly and Sarah saw something in all of us who were in the program," Kyle turns serious again. "They worked on us and with us. That means a lot!"

When Kyle graduated from the program a year ago, his mom and stepdad, the man Kyle fought with who has now become his good friend, were there to celebrate with him. They supported Kyle's recent decision to change jobs from cooking to working at a manufacturing plant. "It feels like an opportunity for growth and advancement," he said, "and I like learning new skills."

To stay healthy, Kyle keeps a routine, he feels the structure of work is important, and he gets outdoors for walking and hiking. He feels hopeful about the future and takes it one day at a time. If GCMHC were to start a support group for current participants and graduates of the program, Kyle says he would attend. He also thinks it's important that he can continue to reach out to and interact with his

*Continued on page 2*

VOLUME 8 ISSUE 1 FEBRUARY 2021



*This past spring, Brenda enjoyed a day of hiking with a friend at Storrs Mountain*

## I'm Not There Yet, But I'm Working on It

"I was a heavy drinker," Brenda begins. "And my alcohol addiction got me into trouble with the law."

Brenda didn't know it at the time, but underlying her medical mix of panic and anxiety was PTSD and Borderline Bipolar Disorder going back to 1999.

The Director of Purchasing for a major regional hospital for 21 years, Brenda's life began unravelling with nausea, panic and anxiety. "I felt like I was carrying the whole world on my shoulders. Leaning on alcohol gave temporary comfort but aggravated my medical problems. I made bad decisions, got into abusive relationships and had a nervous breakdown. When I recovered, I went back to drinking," she sighs. "Depression surrounded me."

Being accepted to Halls of Hope (HOH) in the Grafton County Mental Health Court program allowed Brenda to address her medical condition, rather than going to jail. "Being in a group, I felt comfortable

*Continued on page 2*

## ***Knowing Everything, continued from page 1***

GCMHC support team even after graduation. "The most important things I learned from PMHC were to ask for help, and to appreciate the team that supported me," Kyle underscores. "Putting on a brave face about serious issues doesn't work," he continues, "advocating for yourself shows that you care."

## ***I'm Working on It, continued from page 1***

honestly confronting my alcoholism. I was accepted for who I was and I remember feeling it was a safe place and safety is the beginning of trust."

"I was able to empty out my head of old tapes and make room for new thoughts and I began to feel whole again. I would isolate, but I learned that reaching out is very important. I had great fear of being alone and disconnected from the world I knew. There was so much uncertainty in being removed from what I knew."

While in the HOH program, Brenda relates, "I began to know who I was and who I am, in HOH. It's a process that takes time and thought. I had to learn boundaries." Brenda commenced in June 2020 from HOH, has reconnected with her psychiatrist from HCRS and goes to WISE.

"Working part time has helped me learn to respect myself. I always felt so small. Staying connected to mental health Services, having a new PCP and LADC counselor and seeing my team on a regular basis keeps me balanced."

Looking ahead, Brenda has been invited by West Central Behavioral Health to join a peer-to-peer support group, "I would love to be part of something bigger than I am and share my story and help other people. I have surprised myself. I never realized how intelligent an individual can be when they're clear headed! And, I have learned when in doubt, to reach out and ask for help. Listen to your body."

Brenda is more positive about the things she needs to work on. "I journal when I am struggling most. I revisit the past in my notes to myself. I still isolate too much and need to get beyond this." Brenda is silent for awhile. "I was homeless so many times," she pauses. "I'd love to live in North Carolina to be near my grandkids. I don't want to stop learning. I want to gain independence and strengthen my self-confidence."

"I'm not there, yet, but I'm working on it," she says with determination.

# Your Crime Does Not Have to Define You

When mental health issues, impulsivity and a lack of emotional control produced a threatening situation and the police intervened, Hannah was facing jail. And, in a state with not enough appropriate screening or hospital-based assistance for people with mental illness, she entered the criminal justice system.



Hannah and her new puppy

"But fortunately," according to Hannah's mom, "we also were connected to Shelly Golden and Halls of Hope (HOH), the Grafton County Mental Health Court, an alternative sentencing program for people with mental illness who have committed a crime."

Hannah had been diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), General Anxiety, Major Depression and PTSD. While her parents held her accountable for her actions, they needed an understanding of the NH legal system and an mediator to bridge all parties.

Hannah and her parents found compassion, understanding and support in the HOH courtroom. Hannah has learned that in her desire to be accepted by her peers, she had tended to befriend people who were not the best role models. And she is finding that controlling her anxiety and gaining self-confidence take patience.

***The ADVOCATES' Mission***  
*champions the success  
of Grafton County Mental Health Court  
participants,  
supports and promotes the work  
of judicial programs in Lebanon, Littleton  
and Plymouth District Courts  
which provide an effective and meaningful  
alternative to the traditional criminal justice  
system for individuals with mental illness.*

*The ADVOCATES for Grafton County Mental  
Health Court is a 501(C)(3) corporation.*

*Tax ID #46-3618416*

***YOUR SUPPORT HELPS — THANK YOU!***

When Hannah was unable to stay safe and a police interaction put her back in jail, Shelly's help and HOH legal assistance enabled Hannah to be committed to New Hampshire Hospital (NHH) for a year, providing a safe, secure space where medication and behavior were addressed without the danger of harm to herself and others. Her success at NHH led to a conditional discharge after six months and Hannah resumed attending Halls of Hope.

Supported by West Central Behavioral Health, her fiancé, church friends and pastors, as well as her extended family, Hannah is considering continuing her education, possibly in mental health, and looking forward to a job and marriage. She stays healthy by painting, reading, coloring and enjoying music and TV.

Her mother shares that it can be draining to be the parents of a mentally ill person, even when you are mentally healthy yourselves. "But do not give up hope. Persevere. Separate your life from their issues. This actually makes you stronger so you can fight for them longer and better."

Hannah adds, "Getting mad in the moment can translate into consequences that go beyond you. It doesn't just impact you. Think before you act because you aren't the only one hurt." The turning point for Hannah was "knowing I could go to prison for a long time without improvement, that it was a mental health issue, and that I needed support and to go to the hospital."

Better mental health services probably would have precluded needing HOH, her mom, Lori, emphasizes but, "that said, people should be encouraged to know that there is help through HOH, and that the required participation is a positive aspect of mental health court."

Lori points out that her daughter's case is just one example of inadequate public resources for families dealing with mental illness. When the only options available are private and are way beyond reach, financially, for most families, HOH is currently the only bridge to a better system and plays an important role in our state for those in our society who are overlooked and underrepresented.

"Don't let your crimes define you," Hannah concludes. "They were choices. The longer you avoid responsibility, the longer it takes to get back trust and respect. Don't choose to miss out on life because it's too precious and you can never get back what you missed."