

# Never Give Up

By Christina Owens

Hello! My name is Christina Owens and I am the head of the Children's Department for two public libraries. I have also been diagnosed with a Schizo-affective Disorder, Bipolar I, Bipolar II, Borderline Personality Disorder, and Clinical Depression. My current diagnosis is Bipolar II, but I have come to realize that nobody fits perfectly into those neat little boxes in the DSM Manual.

Between 2015 and 2017, I was in and out of the hospital five times and I spent a total of two months as an inpatient. I completed an intensive outpatient program, and spent countless hours with psychiatrists, nurse practitioners, therapists, and supported employment specialists.

There were many evenings that I would come home and cry for hours. I had uncontrollable intrusive thoughts, and nothing was enjoyable. I took Family Medical Leave from my job and when I tried to start working again, I had a massive panic attack.

When I finally started feeling well enough to work again, I didn't know how to go about it. I knew I wanted to work with children, but after everything I had been through, I didn't know if I could, or if I should. I had a strong education background, but I had never been able to use it because I had gotten sick right out of school. I started working with the supported employment specialists at Mental Health America. I worked with Alex Klein, John Riesenber, Jennifer T., and Tara F. All of them helped me with: resume updates, interview preparation, job searching, and/or talking to employers on my behalf. All of them were extremely helpful with this journey.

I got a part-time job at a factory loading trucks, but that was only supposed to be a temporary solution. Over the next year, I interviewed for 14 different positions. Each time I would get my hopes up, only to have them crushed when I received the rejection letters. I went through another bout of depression and started thinking about applying for disability benefits.

Then, out of nowhere, I was offered a part-time job. Working part-time helped me regain the confidence I had lost, and before I knew it, I had received two full-time job offers.

Looking back, I realize that there are so many points I could have totally given up on my dreams. There were definitely times when I seriously wondered if I would be happy or feel stable again. But I kept plodding along, one foot in front of the other.

Along the way I received a lot of help. I met and worked with many kind and wonderful mental health professionals. My family and the supported employment specialists at Mental Health America were there rooting for me every step of the way.

There were days that I had to drag myself out of bed, and there were days when being successful meant that I had fixed myself a cup of tea in the microwave. But every day I would wake up and set a goal for myself. And eventually, all those little goals added up. If there was one thing I could tell other people who are currently battling mental illness, it would be this: You are stronger than this illness. You are stronger than the voice in your head that is telling you that you are worthless. Keep going, be kind to yourself, and never give up!