



My name is W.J. and I have schizophrenia.

But what is schizophrenia? That Merriam-Webster dictionary states: “ a psychotic disorder characterized by the loss of contact with the environment, by noticeable deterioration in the level of functioning in everyday life, and by disintegration of personality expressed as disorder of feeling, thought (as delusions), perception (as hallucinations), and behavior”.

Schizophrenia is misunderstood as split personality disorder but that is not what it means. As a brochure from ‘NAMI’ publications explains how Eugen Bleuler, a Swiss psychiatrist at the turn of the twentieth century, proposed the Greek terms schizo meaning (Split) and phrene meaning (Mind) to capture this juxtaposition or the act of putting these two words side by side. Dr. Bleuler did not want to confuse our thinking and reasoning by combining these two words together but it is supposed to help us reflect on the mind that deals with a **mismatch between feelings and thoughts** of people experiencing this medical condition.

At the age of 33 I began having symptoms of schizophrenia. I really believed in my delusions, hallucinations coupled with paranoia and strong feelings that bad things were going to happen to me and my beloved ones. My family would plead and try and reason with me that these, feelings and beliefs were not destined to happen to me but my illness insisted otherwise. I was homeless and destitute for about 10 years living in an abandoned trailer and sometimes on the streets. The daily struggle of the overpowering symptoms of my disease and its consequences and not believing I needed treatment took its toll. As a mentally disabled person it took me a long time to get diagnosed. Finally, after many 5150 arrests and trips to the county psychiatric hospital I started to realize I needed help. And with the help of my younger brother and younger sister I was able to accept my disability or limitations as someone ill.

Soon thereafter, I enrolled at ‘mental health clinic’ which helped me with doctors care, a regimen of medications and some counseling but what I didn’t realize at the time was that I needed more than what they were offering me.

Then in November of 2013 my younger sister informed me about a special program designed to help people like me. There I met a social worker at the Arcadia Wellness Center. She was a program staff and she helped me enroll in the CET course. CET is the acronym for ‘Cognitive Enhancement Therapy’. Little did I know the positive impact this program would have in my life.

I remembered when I first started the CET course I was skeptical, doubtful, unsure and incredulous about the program but only after a few weeks I was hooked! What really captured my attention was the program’s homework, computer exercises and the coaches motivating talks that taught me so much. I was learning how to deal with my disabilities and discover strengths within myself I didn’t know I had. The thoughtful and inquiring questions and answers gave me the tools to help me build, decipher and break down the daily struggles I was



experiencing with my disabilities. **For example**, the computer exercises helped me grow and increase my judgment, logic and memory just to mention a few of these abilities. Thank goodness for the pliability of the brain to be able to reshape itself and because of that ability my brain was able to form new connective tissue, what is known as neuro-plasticity. I am now someone that can successfully manage my disease or mental illness and because of this I can enjoy a certain amount of freedom in almost everything I do.

I now connect with people socially a lot better than before. I learned from the CET course how to build connections with the other members of the program too, as well as my contemporaries who are also my coaches and mentors. I remember feeling apprehensive when the program was reaching its end. I did not want the program to end, but it did after one year. I realized after completing the CET program that I learned that change and progress is important to life's growth and to my growth and development as well.

After graduating from the CET program opportunities opened up to me. I now find myself volunteering as a **WOW** which means, 'Wellness Outreach Worker' at the Arcadia Wellness Center in the City of Arcadia. I am connecting with people again and building relationships with my contemporaries at the office. I have been volunteering for 10 months now and it feels great to connect with people and society. I still have my problems and struggles with my diagnosis but I can manage them very well. I live in a house now surrounded by my love ones who support me in my efforts and I have a volunteer assignment with friends at the office. It also feels super to be able to build on my professionalism, reputation, personal character and position as a volunteer at the office. I credit the CET program for helping me become the person I am today.

I now have a purpose in my life. One of my goals I look forward to is attending Cal State University to continue my education and achieve a bachelor's degree as a social worker. Again, I need to say that I wouldn't be here where I am today if I hadn't participated in the CET program.

For those of you, like me, who struggle daily with mental illness I truly and highly recommend the CET program to you so that you too may be informed, equipped with the knowledge, tools to help build and manage your mental disabilities, to make strong connections and to know you don't have to achieve it on your own. Thank you.