

## Robin's story

Robin stood in the lobby not knowing where to turn. Life seemed surreal.

Mere days ago, he had a job, a home, a wife and two children. All that changed when years of unacknowledged, pent-up emotion expressed themselves in a dreadful lapse of judgment: Robin assaulted his wife. Police were called, he was charged, and put in jail.

After a sleepless night, he awakened with difficulty breathing; he was having a mild asthma attack. Released on a surety, he was given his personal effects, but his puffer wasn't there, so he bused to hospital. He told the triage nurse he needed a crisis worker, but when she heard about the asthma, she sent him to the general waiting area. Overstressed and tired, he fell asleep. When he woke up, disoriented, he couldn't remember why he was there, so he left, bused home, washed some pills down with alcohol, and fell into a stupor.

When Robin awoke, he called a crisis service. They advised him to apply for social assistance (Ontario Works) and Legal Aid. He set out for the Ontario Works office, but a staff member there told him that he couldn't apply in person; he had to phone. Heading downstairs to the lobby of the building he just stood there.

Robin said, "I couldn't function. My cognitive ability was severely impaired." The idea of phoning to apply for Ontario Works was overwhelming because "I couldn't even pick up a phone because of very little self esteem." He described the sensation as feeling "stuck in a mood, lost in transition, neglected with very low self-esteem. I thought, I'm losing it ... going overboard."

At that moment, he turned his head and saw a door. The nameplate read: "Canadian Mental Health Association/Peel Branch." Something about the name resonated, and he asked himself, "What's behind that door?" He reached for the doorknob and entered.

A woman walked up to Robin and led him into a quiet room, where she listened attentively to what he had to say. Then she helped him to prioritize. Since his primary need was money and medication, she dialed the number for Ontario Works, and waited for a worker to come on the phone, before handing it over to Robin.

Robin completed the telephone application in private; then the CMHA/Peel Resource Centre staff member returned. Robin told her that they were issuing him a drug card and he could pick up his medication at a local drug store. The staff member gave him a Quick Guide to Mental Health Resources in Peel Region, put an asterisk beside services he might need, such as Mobile Crisis, and wrote her name on the guide, telling him to call if he needed to.

Robin did need to call. He took too many pills a few days later. Waking up in a fog, the CMHA/Peel staff member's name was on his mind. He called, told her what happened, and she connected him to COAST (Crisis Outreach And Support Team) Peel. COAST workers met him, and, concerned about his safety, took him to hospital for a 72 hour psychiatric assessment. The timing was perfect, because Robin had an appointment with an intake worker for CMHA/Peel's long term case management program three days later.

On that day Robin came in for his intake assessment, and stopped on the way out to tell the Resource Centre staff member that when he awoke after taking too many pills, he remembered dreaming of her wearing a crown.

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***Nine months later ...*** Robin walked into the office, with a quiet confidence and sparkle to his eyes. He had come from court where he learned that his sentence was suspended.

"I have remorse for my actions; I can't justify them; I was wrong," he says; yet he hopes to one day earn his wife's trust back. In the meantime he lives alone, sees his children regularly, and attends weekly sessions with both his case manager and psychotherapist. "I'm trying to make life work," he says. "It's not easy to get on track right away; it's all linked to feelings and is all part of my recovery."

Robin's main problem, he said, was that he never expressed his feelings; he kept stuffing them down until they exploded. Now, he says, he can't stop talking about them. He applauds his case manager, whom he describes as "right there with me. She's not 'helping' me; she's there with me, on the road together."

Robin has come a long way and says that "although I was a nice person, I never could see things before because I was always self-conscious about me and my family." Now that he lives on his own and travels by foot or bus everywhere, his eyes are open to the needs of those in his community.

"It's a fast-paced world we live in. When you slow down you see things. I make it my business to notice when, for example, someone needs a door opened, or a seat on the bus." He doesn't stay at home much; he gets out and if, for example, someone in line at a store is having trouble expressing him/herself to a cashier, he'll gently step in and advocate on his/her behalf. An elderly lady who lives alone on his family's street can't shovel her driveway, so he does; and if the neighbour gets to it before he does, Robin will shovel both of their driveways the next time.

Why? "I want to lead them on the same path of recovery I'm on," Robin says with a wide smile.