

# **FROM CRISIS TO CAREER: MY STORY**

## **By David Paul**

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Let me tell you a little about the road of rehabilitation I have traveled from mental illness to full-time employment. About 7 years ago I had a job as a provisional (temporary) caseworker. When I became ill with a neurobiological brain disorder called Kraepelin's Disorder (KD), I quit my job, lost most of my friends, and moved back in with my parents.

For 6 months, all I did was go to a psychiatrist once a week, pick up my mail at my apartment once a week, go to the movies once a week (with a girlfriend who soon faded out of my life), and, for part of the time, go to a typing class once a week.

Then my psychiatrist suggested that I go to Fountain House. When I did, I was given a choice of work assignments, all of which involved helping operate the "clubhouse," as Fountain House is called. I worked closely with supportive staff people, and the work helped rebuild my confidence in my abilities, which I seemed to have lost when I became ill. When your mind lets you down, it seems to shatter your self-confidence.

After a month, a clubhouse staff worker offered me a chance to do paid part-time work. I took three of these temporary jobs called Transitional Employment Program Placements, or TEPs. The TEPs also improved my self-confidence and my work habits. Finally, I felt ready for full-time work.

To start that ball rolling, I first had a session with Melissa Hunt, who expertly prepared my resume. She knew just how to describe my previous job responsibilities on TEPs and earlier jobs.

Then there was a job search preparation class with Ray Bolling and Melissa. They offered encouragement and concrete, step-by-step advice on how to handle and interview: how to dress and how to respond to questions and sell yourself. There were also some practice interviews, both in class and privately with Ray and Melissa.

Finally, Ray mapped a specific strategy tailored to my situation. I told him that I didn't know what kind of job I wanted; what I did want was a job that would let me show some staying power and some stability on my resume. He suggested that I take the federal civil service clerical test and

loaned me a practice book to help me prepare for it. I did very well on the test. He also helped me prepare the long application form.

Ray sent me on one interview with an Internal Revenue Service Office, which didn't land me a job but which was good practice for my next interview. On this second interview, with another IRS Office, Ray accompanied me. What a relief it was to have someone with me to help sell me to the employer. I was hired on the spot.

The job enhanced my life in many ways. For example, I could afford to take courses, see plays, buy a good baseball glove, and purchase records, magazines, and books. My favorite books - my bankbook and my checkbook - have gotten bigger. My income quadrupled when I began working full-time. I now speak about Fountain House to potential employers of Fountain House members and to the staff and members of organizations modeled on the House, and I try to inspire other members of Fountain House to try full-time employment when they are ready.

Fountain House continues to provide support even when you are working full-time. There are social, cultural, and educational programs some evenings and on weekends. There are also full-timers dinners each month and weekly get-togethers for full-timers on Sunday afternoons and Wednesday evenings where you can discuss accomplishments or work related problems. In fact, there is someone available at Fountain House (Susan Riemenschneider or Urva Kissa) to call any time during the week if you need advice or an intermediary with your employer.

Fountain House replaces the network of support that is usually severely strained or completely lost after a major emotional crisis. A properly trained professional helps stabilize an individual, but a rehabilitation process is also required. Fountain House facilitates that process by becoming a network of friends and family wherein joys and sorrows can be shared with sympathetic staff workers, volunteers, and fellow members.

The Transitional Employment Program provides paid, temporary part-time jobs with such employers as Dow Jones and Cravath, Swaine and Moore - jobs that build confidence as well as resumes. The Independent Employment Unit prepares members for full-time jobs and helps with the job search; then it is available to members employed full-time as a source of advice or support during the work week and Sundays, and a place for once-a-month dinners and Wednesday evening and Sunday afternoon get-togethers.

Both the Independent Employment Unit and the Day Program's vocational preparation experience are supplemented by the

**Evening/Weekend Program.** When one experiences an emotional crisis, one tends to withdraw within oneself. Social skills become rusty, or they do not develop. If you don't do anything socially or culturally, there is nothing to talk about with other people, and you become even more isolated. The Evening/Weekend Program, by providing many activities and a variety of classes and supportive contact, turns this vicious cycle into a victorious cycle of learning, socializing, and fun.

Thus, Fountain House provides a well-rounded program of work, play, and education. In those confronted with society's lack of confidence in their capabilities - and their own inner doubts - it develops the learning, earning, and social skills required to get the most out of life.

So I am extremely lucky to have Fountain House and for the last 4 years to be working full-time once again.