



Genesis Club, Inc.

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*A Step Forward for
Anyone with Mental Illness*



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Paul Fontaine, Genesis Member Spotlight

My name is Paul Fontaine and I would like to spend a minute talking about my experiences with Genesis. Over the past year, I have gone through some significant changes. Last October, I started three day orientation with Genesis. During the second day of my orientation, Genesis members, including the orientees, took part in a large demonstration at the Massachusetts State House, protesting proposed budget cuts to clubhouse spending. This was an amazing experience. After completing my three days, I decided I wanted to join clubhouse unit that handles food service. The Kitchen Unit plans, prepares, and serves over 75 meals a day. Having worked several positions in food preparation and serving, I knew my experience would benefit the clubhouse. I decided to work in the kitchen three days a week, coming in at eight in the morning and working until two or three each afternoon.

Working three days a week helped give my life some badly-needed structure and purpose. I have a good relationship with my advisor, Ed Shindle. He has been an integral part in helping me get acclimated at the Genesis program. After several months of helping in the Kitchen Unit, I began to think about employment. In January of 2010, I started a part-time transitional employment position with Quinsigamond Community College, answering the campus switchboard. The job is challenging and the money I earn supplements my disability income. The job has provided me with some additional structure and a sense of responsibility. My position will end in October, but I am already looking at other part-time opportunities, and possibly a full-time position at QCC.

Paul Fontaine Member Spotlight continued...



Paul Fontaine

The most significant change in my life, as a result of working with Genesis, is that I got my own studio apartment in April. Earlier in the year, I was living in a local rest home. It was not an ideal place for me and I did not like living there. Unfortunately, the housing opportunities for adult males are very limited in the Worcester County area and I was not very optimistic about the chances of getting my own place to live. I was hoping to get my own place to live through Genesis, but I feared it would be a long time before that happened. But in late March, Housing Unit Manager, Mark Buchanan, told me of an opening in one of Genesis' apartments and I pursued it. My housing experience with Genesis has motivated me to be one of the best tenants Genesis ever had. I am very grateful to Genesis for presenting me with the opportunity to lease an apartment.

Recently I have branched out into other opportunities in the clubhouse. I have started to write articles for the *Genesis Alive* newsletter and have also expressed an interest in working with the Film Committee. In addition, I am hoping to join the Wellness Group at Assumption College Plourde Center and am also looking to go back to school in the not too distant future. *So while I have done a lot with Genesis so far, there still remains a lot that I would like to accomplish. I look at the future with a variety of options, options that might never have occurred to me had I not joined Genesis.*

My Father

My father was a worker, with his very powerful hands and his naturally quick mind. He ground propellers for Grumman Aircraft; became a 1st class mechanic for Fruehoff Trailers, a licensed pasteurizer, and a trained oil burner technician. He was a stern father who always seemed to be working two jobs to support his family. Providing for his own family was very important to a man deprived of growing up in his birth family. In his "spare" time, he was a licensed shell fisherman on Narragansett Bay, like a driven, untiring machine, he also cleared forest land to sell the firewood. In his late forties, depression hit him as hard as he hit any job he would have undertaken.

The illness changed him; it zapped his great sense of humor, leaving him gloomy and afraid; and it drained his once amazingly endless energy leaving him staring blankly at the television, his day time companion. My mom and my three siblings tried to reach out; we tried to pull him back from wherever the depression was taking him, but it made no or very little difference. In spite of hours spent with him, the depression just waited and slowly drew harder on him. I felt forced to watch this very long, very bad movie about my Dad.



**Jack Casey, LISW
Genesis Club
Board of Directors Member**

Over time I saw the man who could take apart and rebuild a manual transmission turn into a silent shadow of himself. Even working a job in a sheltered workshop, he was uncertain of the "right way" to empty office waste baskets. When that job became "too much", he was home alone all day. Still my family tried to find the husband and father we had known for decades. We failed. Depression's grip was powerful. Medication only smothered his anxieties, and with them, the father we four kids had known, as well as the "Johnny" our Mom had and still loved. Nothing, not one damned thing we tried, ever pulled our father from the stranglehold the sickness had on him. I felt that in the twenty years of his depression, I watched my Dad age forty years. Eventually, after weight gain, came diabetes and insulin; then a stroke at age 62, and eventually, a heart attack took him from us at 68. The year Dad died was 1991; but we lost him long, long before that. In 2008, friends invited my wife and I to tour Genesis Club and I had one of those in-your-heart-and-head conversations with my Dad, "Pop, if this place would have found you, you'd have found your life again! You'd have lived another ten or twenty years." He'd have had a chance to return to meaningful work; to make friends and to be a friend again, to have fun, and to laugh loudly with others. I readily give my time, my energy, my money to Genesis Club, so other son's do not have to lose their fathers, so everyone has a chance to live a long, healthy life.

“You will always need to depend on services and cannot maintain a job. It’s not your fault it is just your illness.”

Those were the words that shaped my life from the age of 19 through 24. It was not said by some ill educated stranger, or a person I knew with malicious intent. That was a quote I heard from therapists and my social worker. They truly thought they were helping. They thought it was the correct way to handle it.

In high school I dreamed of going to college and becoming a writer. Every night I wrote a new poem and proudly presented them to my teachers. Despite being in alternative schools, and receiving two different misdiagnoses, I still applied myself to my academic work. I even took an advanced placement class in European history. In my last year of high school I became very depressed. The depression grew, yet I still functioned. *During my first semester of college, life had become overwhelming. The only thing that broke my numbness was afflicting injury to myself.* Later I found out this is a common, but an unhealthy response to anxiety. At 19, I was sent to the hospital, and then discharged to a group home. All I had worked for, all I had accomplished was gone. No one was willing to help me work on my hopes and dreams. My faith in myself was gone. I put on 120 pounds and weighed 270 pounds. At 22 my grandmother passed away; it was the first major death of a loved one I experienced.

“My life became hospitalization after hospitalization until I was placed at Worcester State Hospital.”



Jeremy Hill

This time was different though, instead of saying “I can’t deal with this, I need to go to the hospital”, I told myself “I have to deal with this, because I have work tomorrow.”

After that I suffered from flashbacks, and the anxiety became too overwhelming. I could not function in society. My life became hospitalization after hospitalization until I was placed at Worcester State Hospital. One year later I was discharged to another group home. Group home life did not provide the services I desired. Slowly I became involved with Genesis.

After four years in a group home I was discharged and I went right into my own apartment. My involvement with Genesis Club increased quite a bit and I started a transitional employment position at Quinsigamond Community College. Not long after that I started to notice my old anxieties returning. This time was different though, instead of saying “I can’t deal with this, I need to go to the hospital”, I told myself “I *have* to deal with this, because I have to work tomorrow”. Now I have finished the position at Quinsigamond Community College. It is the longest I have held on to a job. From this position, I moved on to another transitional position at the Red Cross. With the help of Genesis Club I am now working on getting away from most mental health services. *It has been over a year since I started living in Worcester by myself. Even more important it has been over a year since I have been hospitalized.* My tolerance improves every day because of having to deal with ordinary every day stresses. Weekends now, instead of being dreadful times of loneliness, are eventful with many things to do. My social calendar is full. *Now I have hope for my future again.* My goals are to move on to a full-time position. For the last four months I have been creating my own jewelry business. I am even talking about going back to college.

“You will always need to depend on services and cannot maintain a job. It’s not your fault it is just your illness.” These words now shape my future, I have since learned to fight and overcome this negative stigma. It started out as a road block and now has become an inspiration, helping me to achieve what they said I never could.

*Building Dreams Breakfast - October 28, 2010
Celebrating 22 years of Service*

The Genesis Club Building Dreams Breakfast has become an annual celebration of success and support. This year guests will enjoy Genesis member testimonies, updates from Executive Director Kevin Bradley and Board Member Patrice Muchowski, a short film, and the music of folk singer Meg Hutchinson.

The Genesis Club mission will be delightfully portrayed during this passionate and heartfelt one hour event.

The event is a major component of our Building Dreams Campaign; a grassroots public relations initiative. This event offers an opportunity for Genesis Club to raise unrestricted funds to further our long term mission of supporting individuals with severe mental illness.

We are honored to have **UMass Medical School, Commonwealth Medicine** as the 2010 Major Presenting Sponsor of our Building Dreams Breakfast. For over 20 years, this great Worcester-area institution has been a proud supporter and advocate of individuals with disabilities returning to the workforce.

The two agencies will stand together on the morning of October 28th in offering this inspiring, uplifting event to the community. Today there are 22 Genesis members currently working at UMass Medical School, Commonwealth Medicine division – within the Center for Mental Health Services Research, and the Center for Health Policy and Research. These are only a few areas in which the strong relationship between Commonwealth Medicine and Genesis Club can be seen.

We are also excited about our **Second Major Sponsor, Chartwell's**, who have generously stepped in to provide all of the service and catering for this event. Our relationship with Chartwell's also began with our members, with seven various employment positions, including three at WPI. We are also pleased to have Joseph Kraskouskas, Resident District Manager, as a strong member of our Board of Directors since 2007.

This year's event will surely be a morning to remember, a time to reflect and a time to be inspired. Genesis Club – Celebrating individuals with mental illness as citizens with a voice, and important contributors to the community.



2010 Building Dreams Breakfast

- A time of celebration and support -

Thursday October 28, 2010 7:30am Registration 8:00am – 9:00am Program

Mechanics Hall 321 Main Street Worcester, MA

Interested in reserving a table, attending or sponsoring this event,
please email training@genesisclub.org

2010 Building Dreams Breakfast – RSVP: Call (508) 831-0100 Ext. 30