

My name is Jeff Shair. Despite having schizophrenia and other afflictions I am able to function well in a variety of settings. I am a Consultant for the Philadelphia Department of Behavior Health and Intellectual disability Services, active in a number of advocacy initiatives for the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Penna., Co- Chair for the retreat planning sub- committee of Regional Community Support Program. Presenter for the Scattergood Foundation on stigma reduction and the Sunday school Teacher for adults at my church as well

All of these activities would not have been possible if I didn't receive the support and encouragement of earlier mental health service providers who believed I had variety of skills. Before I went to a mental health program in 1980 I was hospitalized three times between 1969 and 1977. During those years I felt hopeless lonely and rejected. When I enrolled in the program in 1980 I made friends with the other clients in the program. I received a lot of support from my counselor who encouraged me to go on outings with those friends on weeknights and weekends. I kept those friends for several years and that was important because my entire immediate family since then has passed away .My mother, father and brother Paul. In addition I became a staff person at that agency as a Adult Basic Education Teacher for the Center For Literacy in the 90's Furthermore I was only hospitalized once since I participated in the program thirty-five years ago.

Also at that time I became a volunteer for Compeer in Philadelphia. Compeer is an International Organization that matches individuals with mental health issues whom been isolated with volunteers who share similar interests to be their companions. The volunteers come from all walks of life including people with lived experience like me. It was a great experience for me to see my matches improve and feel more comfortable in society as we went to various venues in the city. I was asked to write a monthly column by the staff write those places in the city to give the other matches ideas where to go on their outings.

That was the beginning of my writing career. I then was motivated to go back to college where I was a staff writer for both Community College and Temple University student newspapers. I also have writings appeared in two national publications a book and a magazine. In addition I was an editor for a forensic newsletter in Montgomery County called the Interceptor. All of this writing only came about because I was asked to write for the Compeer newsletter. Unfortunately Compeer Philadelphia lost their funding after being successful for over twenty years in the city a few years ago. It is a much needed program and I hope that it can start up again,

Nevertheless, my cousin Ann who is in her 90's was inspired to start Compeer in Sarasota Fla.after realizing how much I benefited from the program as a volunteer. Ann will be ninety- seven in June as is the founder of the chapter and she signs up volunteers where ever she goes, She is on the board and so am I.I participate at their meetings by conference call.

So you can see my life could be completely different if people didn't believe in me. How many other people with mental health issues could have a better life if they only had the chance?