

“My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am depressed.” I was once told when I introduced myself in this way to a group therapy class at Community Mental Health that our mental illness does not define us so we should not introduce ourselves in a such a way. We should instead say “My name is Gabrielle Borneman and I have major depressive disorder.” This lesson has stuck with me ever since being told that so many years ago. I never introduced myself in that way again.

I started attending Blue Water Clubhouse when I was twenty years old. I was the youngest member there. A clubhouse is a psychosocial rehabilitation center in which people with a history of mental illness can attend to help them find employment, complete their GED or attend college, and improve their social skills. I attend clubhouse to this day at twenty-nine years old. It has become a mainstay in my recovery and my life in general. I have met so many people who, every day, do not let their mental illness define them. Like me.

I have learned how to cook thanks to clubhouse. I love cooking for other members and letting them enjoy my favorite foods. We serve lunch and I always volunteer to help with that. I also tend to help teach other members at clubhouse how to cook as well. One year I suggested having a cookie bake off where whoever wanted to participate baked a cookie in the afternoon and then we voted on whose cookie was the best. I remember making candy cane cookies from scratch. They were a huge hit! Clubhouse always has

these opportunities for people to share their ideas and put them into practice. I love contributing to that.

Community Mental Health has also helped me in my recovery as well. They provide me with avenues to let my creativity and uniqueness shine. As an example, today I attended a group called Adult Socialization where we decorated Christmas ornaments. I started painting a mistletoe on one. Before I knew it, I was asked if I could show this other person how to do it similarly to how I did it. This example shows that whenever I get the opportunity, I love teaching and helping others.

Another resource Community Mental Health provides is the opportunity to advocate for myself. This year we traveled by charter bus to Lansing, Michigan for an event called Walk a Mile. We got to march around the capitol of Michigan and chant and hold signs and advocate for our mental health. It was an experience I will never forget thanks to Community Mental Health.

A lot of people would probably change who they are if they had a mental illness. However, I like who I am and thanks to the resources I have in my life, I like helping others find the power to like who they are too.

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