

## Supported Employment Success Story

Marlys Breon-Drish

Katie has had serious problems with her diagnoses of Bipolar Disorder and Borderline Personality Disorder for 20 years and was in and out of hospitals. She also had problems with her back and overuse of prescription drugs. While ill with her bipolar disorder, she was charged with theft in 2010, another seeming barrier to employment. In spite of her illness, Katie always tried to work and was able to get numerous jobs but they didn't last long.

In January of 2014, Katie requested supported employment services at the Southern Iowa Mental Health Center upon the recommendation of her case manager. At that point, she had been stable for two years after starting on a new medication, Invega, which worked well for her. At her very first SE appointment, Katie indicated that her "dream job" would be to work at The Little Bake Shop, a privately owned and run bakery in downtown Ottumwa which did not have any openings at the time.

After doing all of our preliminary work, i.e., discovery, resume writing, researching options, resolving barriers, etc., the owner of The Little Bake Shop, Melissa Little, was approached about Katie's interest in working for her business. Melissa was willing to consider a time-limited observation for Katie to learn the bakery business, but there were no guarantees for employment. She met privately with Katie who was very open about all aspects of her life. The result: Katie began her two-week internship on April 21 and was officially hired on May 5!

Katie works 20 hours per week and hopes to increase her hours in the future as needed by the bakery. She is working on a PASS in order to purchase a car so she can work evenings and weekends. She also plans to improve her cake decorating skills by taking an evening class at the local community college.

Katie's ongoing supports include her case manager, Habilitation Waiver services, Intensive Psychiatric Rehabilitation services, AA, and SE services at the Southern Iowa Mental Health Center. Her employer, Melissa Little, is also a great support to her and believes in giving people a second chance. Katie says she is "absolutely inspiring!" Melissa says that Katie is very conscientious and able to do the job. Melissa knows that there are many different kinds of disabilities but one of the most misunderstood is mental illness. She recognizes that **not** working is not helpful and finds it refreshing that Katie wants to do something positive with her life.



*Melissa & Katie*



*Katie & Melissa*

An interesting twist to this story is that, unbeknownst to us, Melissa was raised by parents who are blind. In spite of their challenges, they, too, benefited from employers willing to hire and give them a chance to show their abilities. Her parents started a variety of their own businesses and remain successfully self-employed.

Thank you Katie and Melissa for sharing your stories.

*Marlys Breon-Drish has been a Licensed Bachelor Social Worker at the Southern Iowa Mental Health Center in Ottumwa, IA, for 34 years. Marlys was hired on a grant in 1980 to develop a Community Support Program, and over time, her job duties changed to also include Supported Community Living, Elderly Outreach, and Day Treatment. In 2001, she became the Director of the Mental Health Center's drop-in/resource center, Promise Center, for adults with mental illness. Part-time Supported Employment services were added to her job duties in 2010 and she has been on the IA-APSE Board since that time, serving three years as Secretary.*

## **Promise Center Success Story**

By "Dale"

"I can't recall how I found out about Promise Center, but what matters is finding myself walking in the door the first time. I didn't even know what a drop-in center is. You might be in the same place as I was --- feeling isolated, misunderstood, anxious, and depressed.

There is a world out there that makes me feel like a square peg in a round hole---it's called stigma and it makes me feel very wary and unsafe.

As soon as I walked in I was warmly welcomed by the social worker and she filled out my membership application in no time flat and I became a member the same day. The place felt safe almost immediately and the members were chatting and having fun. I envisioned that I would gain a "surrogate family" at the Promise Center. After a number of visits, that's exactly what they became.

I'm Dale and happen to have Type 1 Bipolar Disorder and anxiety---a very uncomfortable combination, but like everyone here, no one defines anyone by their mental illness(s). We're people, good people. Our numerous members suffer from any in a broad spectrum of mental illness(s). There is nothing like shared experiences to bring people together in a special way. Promise Center is special in many ways and I urge you not to suffer alone. I felt very much alone until I discovered Promise Center. This Center was created for me and you alike and everyone you'll meet are thy brother's and sister's keepers. Stop in, we'd all like to meet you."