

## Alicia's Story

I have struggled to manage my behavioral health conditions since I was very young. I started off in the projects... this is where everything began.

At the age of 11, I started running with the wrong crowd. I joined a gang and started smoking marijuana and cigarettes. I was frequently suspended from school for fighting or smoking on school property and ultimately expelled from school for an assault on a teacher and a student. I participated in illegal activities like selling drugs, burglary, and auto theft, and received gun-related charges. When I was 15, I was introduced to cocaine, which quickly took over my life. I became distant from my family who grew very worried for my safety. They did not trust that I could take care of myself.

**Key Tip: Listen to others and be open to their perspectives**

*Sometimes, especially when you have dealt with the streets for so long, you like to see things from your perspective and no one else's. When you get into recovery, it helps to have an open mind and look at things from different angles.*

I was later diagnosed with bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and major depression. I had trouble managing my conditions and taking medicine as prescribed. During this time, I was arrested and sent to jail on multiple occasions. My most challenging struggle was when I was shot and then laid in a coma for almost three months.

**Key Tip: Have a relationship with your therapist or peer supports**

*If something isn't working well with your therapist, speak up to him or her or to another staff member. It can also sometimes feel more comfortable to speak with peer staff, someone who has walked down a similar road in life.*

Almost five years passed from the time that I was diagnosed until I began to see a therapist. After my last jail sentence, I got in contact with a behavioral health organization that welcomed me with open arms and introduced me to the therapist who I still see today. With my therapist's help, I am able to self-manage my medications. I also meet with peer support staff who help talk me through tough times, and participate in support groups where I have made lasting relationships with people who understand what I have been through and have their own stories to tell. Listening to others and staying connected in this way reminds me

that I am not alone in all of this.

Today, I no longer participate in illegal activities. I make sure to spend a lot of time around positive people, including those who I met through my behavioral health organization. I take all medications as prescribed and am no longer a cocaine or heroin user. I continue to attend and sometimes facilitate support group meetings and am now pursuing my GED. My relationships with my family have improved – I have regained my family's trust. Most importantly, I trust and believe in myself.

## Alicia's Self-Management Strategies

- **Developing Positive Relationships:** Surrounding myself with compassionate people who I trust and who want me to be successful in my recovery has been crucial to my progress. When I participate in support groups, for instance, I am surrounded by positive people who care about my health and well-being. I have since led groups and facilitated discussions.
- **Medication Management:** I take my medication as prescribed. If a medication does not agree with me, I go back and speak with my prescribing physician. When you are prescribed a new medication, there is a pamphlet that comes along with it. Make sure you ask questions about likely side effects and the purpose of the medication, so that when you begin to take it, you are more familiar with how you should feel.