

## Maria's Story

Shortly after I began living on my own in my early 20s, I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. I struggled with taking my prescribed medications regularly, and was evicted from my apartment for not paying rent and disturbing neighbors. I was transported to a nearby mental health center by the police. I was tired, confused, and hungry.

### Key Tip: Embrace healthy change

*Recovery is a process of growth and change that engages an individual in leading a fulfilling life.*

The atmosphere in the health center helped me survive. Simple things, like playing records and drawing flowers, brought me a sense of comfort and familiarity. A group of social workers dedicated to helping people with severe mental illness find a place in the community worked with me during my stay. With their help, I started taking my medications as prescribed, and I began to feel like myself again.

My social worker set me up with a couple of interviews for potential places to live and identified a resident group home. After leaving the mental health center, I got into the social worker's car carrying a trash bag with my only possessions – a towel, a face cloth, an alarm clock, a toothbrush, and a bar of soap. Even though I did not have much, I began to feel a glimmer of hope when I received the key to my room and moved in!

I reached out to my family, with whom I had a strained relationship following my bipolar disorder diagnosis. I started seeing a therapist who worked with me to set goals focused on managing my medications to prevent a relapse. I participated in Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) support groups where I met close friends who introduced me to Buddhism. I began to feel more connected to my spirituality and was encouraged to continue to participate in the WRAP program.

During the past 15 years, I have become a strong advocate for mental health recovery, and I have become a Certified Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) Facilitator, as well as a peer support specialist and peer facilitator. While my recovery journey has included many obstacles, I have made so much progress. I now have a six-year excellent rental history and I am no longer in danger of being evicted. I meet with my therapist weekly and I am in touch with my family.

## Maria's Self-Management Strategies

- **Goal Setting and Action Planning:** I have developed a detailed WRAP plan and use clip art to make it my own. I have a support network and a recovery plan that includes family, friends, mental health providers, peer supports specialists, and my pet cat!
- **Wellness Tools:** WRAP certification has helped me to self-manage my conditions. It has equipped me with wellness tools that I can use such as self-hypnosis and medication management. If I get stuck somewhere along the way, I can return to WRAP and find a self-management technique that will help me. Visit WRAP's website to access resources, tools, and other information about the program: <http://mentalhealthrecovery.com/wrap-is/>.