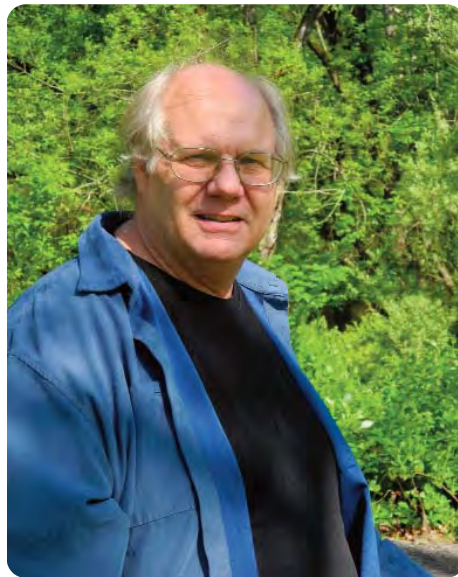

Depression and Anxiety Insurmountable Barriers to Work for Former IT Technician

FLEMINGTON

Akavar Dylutra received his bachelor's degree in 1975, and worked in media, then technology for 30 years in the corporate world. When his department was downsized, and attempts to reconnect with family resulted in emotional turmoil, problems that had been buried for years began to rise to the surface.



“I had gone through my 401K, had gone through my credit cards, and had no money left to live on. And I just said, you know, ‘why bother?’”

Mr. Dylutra quit working in 2005, marking the beginning of what he refers to as an “extensive four-year depressive event,” although this recognition comes in hindsight only. At the time, he simply thought he would take some well-deserved time off from work and figure out what he wanted to do next. Over the course of the next few years, the anxiety and depression he had managed his whole life ceased to be manageable.

“I didn’t live an extravagant lifestyle, so I went for a couple of years, kind of enjoyed myself—traveled around the country a little bit. And I didn’t really start to look at the fact, until I got about two years into this, that I’m just not getting myself back together to go back to work.”

As the money dried up, Akavar became increasingly isolated, and says, “I had gone through my 401K, had gone through my credit cards, and had no money left to live on. And I just said, you know, *why bother?* At that point, I had already rebuilt my life a couple of times and I just couldn’t see

myself doing it again. So I wound up with a couple of suicide attempts.” Akavar was unaccustomed to asking others for help, and unfamiliar with the type of help that would even be available to him, so he didn’t receive any to speak of until his suicide attempts led him to the hospital. While there, he realized that the symptoms of depression and anxiety stretched as far back as early childhood.

“When I was in the inpatient unit for depression—depression and the suicide attempt three years ago—I was listening to what they were describing about people with depression and anxiety and I realized that I had full-blown depression at five years old. I had high anxiety. I couldn’t remember a time that I didn’t wake up with my heart in my throat, a pounding in my ears—just an absolute dread of the day.” He recalls self-inflicted injuries, isolating behavior, and a feeling that he could not turn to those around him for help. “As a child, if I asked for things, most the time, I was ridiculed, or just in some way belittled, so I stopped asking for stuff as a kid.”

“In my family, the ability to appear functional was very important. ... It did not matter if I was going through hell inside. As long as I appeared to be functional, I was rewarded by not having any attention drawn to me. During my 30 years in the corporate world, this became a very important skill.”

Even the best hidden emotional distress takes a toll, and while Akavar may have succeeded in appearing functional most of the time, there were many examples of his mental illness impeding his progress over the years. Take the time an employer was paying for his master’s degree and he quit just

a few credits shy of graduation because his anxiety level was so high. Or years later, after he was discharged from the hospital and referred to Legal Services for help with a Social Security Disability claim, when he was unable to complete the paperwork necessary to win his claim. “There were several times that I almost lost the thread of my case with Legal Services because I just got too anxious to open the mail.”

After two years, Akavar’s disability claim was approved, but the road to recovery has not been easy. At one point, he was nearly homeless, which would surely have been more than he could bear. What he took away from that experience is that you need to keep asking what other help is available, because help is usually not offered simply because a need is identified. “I had to learn to keep asking, *what else can you do for me?* Not as a selfish thing, but more of self-preservation.” It was the third time he had asked his [case] worker if he knew of any help available to help him save his housing,

“I couldn’t remember a time that I didn’t wake up with my heart in my throat, a pounding in my ears—just an absolute dread of the day.”

that his worker said, “Yes, we can provide rental assistance.”

Akavar is now receiving disability benefits and has become active with *In Our Own Voice*, a program of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness), through which he offers presentations about mental illness and how it has impacted his life. “My diagnosis is major depression, some anxiety issues, and substance abuse issues. So, in getting out and doing the presentation, I learned to start to deal with the anxiety of doing presentations.”

“People with depression frequently have isolating behavior,” he explains, so getting out and having to talk to people about his illness is good therapy. It also ensures that he gets out of his apartment during the day,

which helps prevent another downward spiral into depression. He continues to take his prescribed psychotropic medications, attend therapy, and participate in a 12-step program.

Akavar no longer has extra cash to spend, but he has some serenity. He is grateful that through his work with



NAMI, ongoing therapy, and an intentional effort to learn to trust others, he has “gotten much better at matching the external appearance of being functional to my true internal state—[one of] growing internal happiness.” ❖

Interview completed May 10, 2012.



Help Legal Services help more people like Mr. Dylutra.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Visit [LSNJ's website, www.LSNJ.org](http://www.LSNJ.org), for general information about Legal Services or the [Poverty Research Institute](#) page for detailed reports about poverty in New Jersey. For more information about your legal rights, visit LSNJLAW.

FOR HELP: Through its [statewide, toll-free hotline, 1-888-LSNJ-LAW \(1-888-576-5529\)](#), Legal Services offers telephone advice to people who have been unfairly denied cash benefits, food stamps, or rental assistance, as well as certain health programs, including Medicaid/NJ Family Care, Charity Care, and PAAD. You may also apply for services online at <https://lsnjlawhotline.org> or contact a [Regional Legal Services program](#) for help.

TO MAKE A DONATION: For information on how to donate to Legal Services, visit LSNJ.org.