

# **In Our Own Words:**

## **“Beating the Odds...**

## **Transforming Our Lives”**

**Written by**

**Sarah  
& Deborah**

**Photographs by  
Ken Kondo**





*Minds and Matters was invited to hear the compelling and triumphant stories of current and former clients and consumers who have recovered from their mental illness. One by one they approached the podium, nervous and scared. Each one ended their speeches with confidence as the DMH staff gave them a standing ovation, but two stood out above all of the rest, Sarah and Deborah.*

**S**arah began her presentation by saying, I am as happy as Julie Andrews in the movie "Mary Poppins." Things are going well for me now, but there was a time when things were not going so good.

My childhood was not easy. It was unfortunately plagued with abuse. I was not allowed to talk or express myself. I became frustrated and enraged with anger. My dad passed away, and later on in life my son left me. It was a double whammy, and this led to a lot things that were wrong with me.

My bouts with depression were severe. I was bedridden because of it. As a child, I still remember closing the shades to the windows in my room, and I would just sit on my bed in the darkness. While my friends and family attended school, I did not. I was unable to eat. I could not concentrate which was one of the reasons, why, I decided not to go to school. I was fearful that the other children would make fun of me. I was scared and embarrassed of my condition. Because of my lack of schooling, I had difficulty in reading and writing which made me more frustrated and angry. Eventually, my thinking was so scattered that people were afraid of me.

Approximately 14 years ago, I was referred to Compton Mental Health Center (CMHC). I attended and participated in the group and treatment programs. I did this for the next nine years.

In 2002, I met my guardian angel, Rosemarie Andrews, an Occupational Therapist who operates the CMHC's Work Center. If it was not for her, I would not be here today.

I did not know if I was going to survive as I entertained thoughts of ending my life, but Ms. Andrews told me that there was hope, and that I could recover from my mental illness.

She never gave up on me and convinced me to participate in an arts program. Ms. Andrews told me, art can reach a person, even those who have difficulty in reading and writing, and that was me. Art has helped me to concentrate, organize my thoughts, but most importantly, it allowed me to express feelings.

My therapist Demetrius K. Aguebor helped me write a 10-page letter when my dad died. There in the letter I admitted to suffering from bouts of depression, and it helped me a lot.

To this day, I get frustrated sometimes, but when I am doing my artwork, two dimensional design, somehow my brain is stimulated, and I function better in regards to my memory and concentration levels.

In 2003, I began to volunteer at CMHC as a part-time Peer Advocate, in addition to serving as a member of the CMHC's Consumers Council. The council has been developing a program in reference to the themes of recovery and wellness.

My long range goal is to some day work at CMHC as a full-time Peer Advocate. Recently, I completed the 16-week training course. When asked the question, why do I want to be a Peer Advocate? I tell them to hopefully inspire other clients and consumers to successfully recover from their mental illness.

Sarah is attending Los Angeles City Community College majoring in psychology. She also serves as an intern with the United States Veterans Administration and CMHC.

For more information about the CMHC's Work Center and its programs, call (310) 668-6920.

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**O**pening up crumpled up pieces of paper as she wheeled herself to the podium was Deborah. She began her speech in a quiet voice...I have raised three children...I was diagnosed bi-polar and manic depressive. I was homeless and used drugs. Finally after living in miserable conditions for so many years, I decided to ask for help. I got help from my psychiatrists, therapists, and medication.

I stand in front of you, and proudly say, I am on the road to recovery!

One of the organizations that has helped me get back on the road to recovery was Project Return the Next Step. There, I received training on how to be a Peer Advocate. I completed the course. For two years I worked at Exodus Day Rehab Program, and now I am a jobs coach at Easter Seals. I also have been clean and sober for three-and one-half years. It took for me to get sick, ask for help, and have others help me out, and now, I want to help others who are experiencing what I just went through.

I am a student at Southwest Community College. In three semesters, I hold a 4.0 grade point average majoring in psychology. One day, hopefully soon, I will enroll at Cerritos Community College and continue my studies in psychology and social sciences.

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