

## **HOW CET HELPED ME**

**By W.J., LACDMH Volunteer**

My name is W.J. and I have schizophrenia.

At the age of 33, I began having symptoms of schizophrenia. I really believed in my delusions and hallucinations, coupled with paranoia and strong feelings, that bad things were going to happen to me and my loved ones. My family would try to reason with me that these feelings and beliefs were not destined to happen, but my illness insisted otherwise. I was homeless and destitute for about 10 years, living in an abandoned trailer and sometimes on the streets. The daily struggle of the overpowering symptoms of my disease and its consequences took its toll. As a mentally disabled person, it took me a long time to get diagnosed. Finally, after many 5150 arrests and trips to the county psychiatric hospital, I started to realize I needed help. And with the help of my brother and sister, I was able to accept my disability and limitations as someone ill.

Soon, thereafter, I enrolled at a mental health clinic which helped me with medical care, medications and some counseling, but what I didn't realize at the time was that I needed more than what they were offering me.

Then in November 2013, my sister informed me about a special program designed to help people like me at the Arcadia Wellness Center. I met a social worker at the center who helped enroll me in the Cognitive Enhancement Therapy (CET) course. Little did I know the positive impact this program would have in my life.

I remembered when I first started the CET course, I was skeptical, doubtful and unsure about the program. Only after a few weeks, I was hooked! What really captured my attention was the program's homework, computer exercises and the coaches' motivational talks that taught me so much.

I was learning how to deal with my disabilities and discover strengths within myself I didn't know I had. The thoughtful questions and answers gave me the tools to help me build, decipher and break down the daily struggles I was experiencing with my disabilities. For example, the computer exercises helped me grow and increase my judgment, logic and memory. Thank goodness for the pliability of the brain to be able to reshape itself and form new connective tissue, known as neuro-plasticity. I am now someone that can successfully manage my disease or mental illness and enjoy a certain amount of freedom in almost everything I do.

I now connect with people socially a lot better than before. I learned from the CET course how to build connections with the other members of the program, too. I remember feeling apprehensive when the program was reaching its end. I did not want it to end, but it did after one year. After completing the CET program, I learned that change and progress are important to life's growth and to my growth and development as well.

After graduating from the CET program, opportunities opened up to me. I now volunteer as a Wellness Outreach Worker (WOW) at the Arcadia Wellness Center. I have been volunteering for 10 months now and it feels great to connect with people and society. It also feels super to be able to work on my career, reputation, and personal character.

I still have my problems and struggles with my diagnosis but I can manage them very well. I live in a house surrounded by my loved ones who support me in my efforts. I now have a purpose in my life. One of my goals is to attend Cal State University to continue my education and achieve a bachelor's degree as a social worker. I credit the CET program for helping me become the person I am today.

For those of you, like me, who struggle daily with mental illness, I truly and highly recommend the CET program to you, so that you, too, may be equipped with the knowledge and tools to help build and manage your mental disabilities and know you don't have to do it on your own.