

BEYOND LOCKED DOORS

Sitting in the day hall on the unit Adult C at Westborough State Hospital, I anxiously awaited to meet with the director of the new group home I was going to be (Hopefully) moving in to. It was called Front Street. At this point I had been at Westborough State Hospital for two years, nine months and this new opportunity thought very scary, was very cool. You see almost my whole admission at Westborough I wouldn't even let the staff mention discharge. In fact I couldn't even say the word aloud. I called it "the D word" when I absolutely had to talk about it and even saying that made me cringe. But now I was different...this discharge from the hospital was being initiated by me (to my treatment teams shock.) And I was comfortable with it. Not to say that I wasn't anxious About the whole thing, but I actually felt ready to leave those two locked doors. Anyway back to the day hall (which at that point I was looking out the door every two seconds) I finally saw my social worker Sheryl walking with this really kind looking lady next to her. Sheryl came in and told me that I was going to be meeting with the director alone, and that is when I was introduced to Amy Morgan.

I followed Sheryl and Amy into the Unit Directors office and then Sheryl left Amy and me alone. She started the interview and I was so nervous...She wanted me to tell her about my past and my self harm and suicidal behaviors and I told her straight out "I am afraid that if I tell you those things, I'll scare you and you won't let me in Front Street!" and she said "Oh, we'll let you in!" And that's how my trust with Advocates began and started me on the path of learning what abilities I was capable of.

So for the next month or so, I went on numerous dinner visits where I met my peers who I was going to live with and the staff who were extremely supportive during this big, big, BIG CHANGE in my life. I got to the point where I started to dread coming back to the hospital and got really comfortable at Front Street. The transition was taking quite a while because they wanted to make sure I had a stable crisis plan when I got out in the community because other times when I was in group homes I struggled quite a bit.

My goal was to get discharged before my 24th birthday which was February 16th but it looked like that wasn't going to be possible so I had the next best thing...My birthday at Front Street on an overnight visit and then going right out with my parents. It was the best birthday I had in years.

Finally (and only three days after my birthday) I got discharged from Westborough State Hospital!!! I was so happy! And finally I could start to strive for my goals that I had always wanted.

The first couple weeks here were great! I felt ecstatic to be let out of that "expletive deleted" place!! I had a housemate who I already knew and got along with and she was making me feel extremely welcome here. And while I was settling in I was continuing my online college English class that I had started while I was in Westborough.

But as time went on things got harder...I guess you could say the “honeymoon period” was over and I was thrown back into reality. Now I had chores and responsibilities and I wasn’t used to it so it felt all new. But at Front Street they didn’t judge me; they found a way to help me with my responsibilities. Kristin helped me clean my room where the boxes had been piled up for almost a month and she didn’t get mad. She asked if I needed help and the first few times I refused it but then I realized I couldn’t do it on my own. So I let her help me and we got the room really really clean. I slacked off on my chores at the beginning of my stay and when I got confronted by my peers it taught me that my actions do have an effect on others, no matter how small. I also learned that when I started therapy with my DBT therapist Suzanne. When I didn’t fill out my diary card it didn’t just affect me, it affected the therapeutic, relationship by not letting her see how she could best help me.

Then a couple weeks into my stay, for a couple different reasons, I was the only one in the apartment and I really got scared. I mean there still was staff and other clients in the other apartments but I had never lived on my own before. So I struggled daily with feelings of isolation, loneliness, and a bit of depression. But the staff was there to support me and it showed me that I had the ability to live on my own and I would not have to depend on other people for the rest of my life just because I had a mental illness.

But a week later things got back to normal. Now I touched a little bit on my therapist earlier. At first ((which is completely normal) I had a hard time opening up to her and trusting her. But as the weeks went by I was able to start talking about things that were bothering me and even started to use the “couching” telephone calls.

Now I don’t know why I thought this at the beginning of my stay but I thought that it would be smooth sailing and I wouldn’t hit any bumps, at least not for a while. But almost two months into my stay at Front Street warning signs started to show up and my red flags started to pop out everywhere. I was smoking again and I was dressed all in black. I even stopped eating. I was planning to act on a suicidal plan when one of the staff recognized a sign and called Amy Morgan and she talked with me and asked me honestly if I had a plan. I can’t lie to Amy so I told her and I made a safety plan with her and I made it through the night...till this day I am grateful for her for two reasons...for saving my life and for showing me I did have the ability to make the choice whether I stayed safe or not and that it was in MY control. Which led to my decision the next day, (because I was still feeling horrible) to voluntarily check myself into Marlborough Hospital for 4 days and maintain my safety. And ever since I have come back I have been working as hard as ever to stay out of the hospital.

Now I am going forward! Continuing to see that I am able to keep myself safe and make that choice for myself. I will be starting to go to actual classes on Quinsigamond College’s campus this summer to continue to pursue my goal of a sign language interpreter. I will continue to be at Front Street for the two year DBT program and then hopefully move to supported housing.

And finally, people say that there is a light at the end of a dark tunnel//well mine is shining bright and showing me that I can do it, that I can fight my mental illness and that I have the ability to succeed!!