

FINDING HOME AGAIN

United Way agencies helped AJ when he left home as a teen. Now, he's reconnected with his family, thinking about school, and helping other young people. ♦

"I should have been successful, but I wasn't.

When I was nine or ten, I was diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). That led to other diagnoses: generalized anxiety and depression.

Growing up, I was in the gifted program at school, but I got into shouting matches with my teachers. Things like that happened a lot. Teachers were constantly telling me to leave. Eventually, I did - I'm a high school dropout. I pretty much stopped going to school in Grade 10.

My first job was working at a fast food restaurant, where they viewed me as difficult because I wouldn't take out the trash. My refusal to take out the trash was because of my OCD, which was germ-related and was very bad at that time. I would shower up to four times a day. I had little social life, which really hindered my growth as a person.

The OCD also made it difficult for me to get along with my family. I really love my parents. They helped me to find different doctors, but I felt like no one was listening to me.

"I VOLUNTEER WITH YOUTH AS A PEER SUPPORT WORKER - IT REALLY HELPS ME TO BE ABLE TO HELP OTHERS"

My depression was so bad that it manifested as suicidal thoughts. By the time I was 18, it was way too much for me. I had no money. I had no education. I ended up leaving home. I would stay in the hospital for a 72-hour hold, or I'd go to a homeless shelter. I didn't want to go home.

Eventually, I was connected with a social worker through a program that's supported by United Way. The social worker helped me get provincial disability support and access a range of services, including counselling, housing, peer support and skill development that made me feel more hopeful about my future.

Today, I volunteer with youth as a peer support worker at the agency. It really helps me to be able to help others. I no longer feel like a burden on society.

I still work with my social worker one-on-one. We've looked at finding work for me and applying to schools as a mature student. It's nice to know that people care about me and want me to succeed. That's pretty powerful." -AJ



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Saskatoon & Area

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