



LOST IN NEW YORK: FOUND IN CHARLOTTE

by Benjamin Ogunrinde,
MHA Ambassador and Compeer Assistant

At the onset of my illness in December 1999, I did not realize that I was going through some mental health issues. When it all started, my brothers took me to two different hospitals in New York City, where I lived at the time. At each facility, I was admitted and I did not know what for. Later I learned I had been diagnosed with severe depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

This all happened around the Y2K phenomenon—remember when everybody was under the impression that the world would come to an end when 2000 came? There seemed to be chaos everywhere, a state of confusion both on the radio and television. At least that was how things appeared to me.

Around that time, I had just secured employment with the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunication in New York City. But because of my condition, I was paranoid and I thought people were out to harm me, especially my colleagues in the office. It got to the point that I could no longer function. I was in constant conflict with my co-worker in the next cubicle. I simply had to walk away from the best job I had ever had.

Subsequently, I could not go out and when I did, I would be hearing voices telling me to do scary things. One time, the voices instructed me to go underground with the subway running and when I tried to emerge, the exit was blocked and several terrifying hours later, I had to retrace my steps to find my way above ground again.

Then in 2001, came the 9/11 catastrophe which really convinced me that the world was actually coming to an end. Fortunately, one of my brothers lived in Charlotte and asked me to move down here.

Although I escaped the tragic events of NYC, I didn't escape the voices in my head in Charlotte. Once, the voices told me to crawl on all fours and cross the street. As I was doing this, I was hit by a car and rushed to Carolinas Medical Center. When my body had begun the healing process, I was transferred to Partial Hospitalization at Behavioral Health Center, then to Inner Vision day treatment program, so that my mind could begin the healing process as well.

My brother has provided me with the stable environment and support within which to receive the psychosocial rehabilitation services at InnerVision. Inner Vision paved the way for me to come to the Mental Health Association of Central Carolinas. In 2006, I secured a part-time position with the MHA's Compeer Program and fortunately, I have found a second family here. The Compeer program provides avenues for those diagnosed with severe and persistent mental challenges to combat loneliness and isolation by making friendship matches with volunteers from the community. I help the Compeer program organize monthly social events for those individuals waiting to be matched.

These supportive relationships and proactive activities, combined with medication and therapies, help individuals like me find hope and aspiration for wellness on the road to recovery. Now that I have found myself in Charlotte, I find purpose and fulfillment in helping others through my work at the MHA. And this voice is the only one I hear. ♦



The MHA's Compeer program provides one-to-one volunteer supportive friendships and mentoring to adults in mental health recovery. Our program has proven to achieve positive outcomes of reduced social isolation for adults on their recovery journey. Contact us at 704.365.4380 or mha@mhacentralcarolinas.org. Or visit the Compeer page at www.mhacentralcarolinas.org.