

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Justin's Story: Finding A Partner For The Journey Of Recovery

(NAPSA)—Justin McKinley thought he was holding it together, even as he battled delusional thoughts and paranoia. In 2009, he was diagnosed with schizophrenia, but Justin had a difficult time accepting his condition—he was depressed, angry and didn't want to listen to his family, friends and doctor, or take his medication.

"There was just a lot of turmoil going on in my life," recalls Justin, 28, who had left college and had become homeless. His life had hit rock bottom.

Justin, who is known to family and friends as a jokester with a contagious laugh, loves to express his imagination and creativity through art and music.

He especially values his friendships and is grateful that his friends stayed by his side even when his illness interfered with doing the things they all enjoyed, such as playing video games, shopping, and making music.

After his diagnosis, his friends noticed that Justin was not himself when he didn't take his medication and had a heart-to-heart talk with him. They were afraid that if he did not seek help, their relationship would deteriorate. This frank conversation helped Justin come to terms with his diagnosis and recognize the importance of following his doctor's orders.

Today, Justin lives independently. And while his friends have made a huge difference in his journey of recovery, so, too, has his nurse.

Fredrico James, RN, is certified in crisis intervention and prevention and as a medication assistant



Justin McKinley, 28, was diagnosed with schizophrenia in 2009.

supervisor. He currently works as the clinical assistant to the medical director at Birmingham's Jefferson-Blount-St. Clair Mental Health Authority in Alabama, where he educates patients and caregivers on symptom management, medication, recovery and community resources.

Fredrico, who goes by Rico, met Justin four years ago through a homeless services program. Over time and as a result of Rico's warm and open demeanor, Rico became a key member of Justin's treatment team.

Justin says of his nurse, "He's very down-to-earth and caring. I feel lucky to have been introduced to Rico. People with schizophrenia don't always have a health care provider who sees them as more than a patient or who talks about more than medication or symptoms."

Rico sees himself "as a cheerleader."

"I believe Justin and all patients should know that there are people

who care about how they are doing—both in recovery and in their personal lives," he says.

Justin and Rico have worked together to make decisions about Justin's recovery, such as choosing a long-acting injectable (LAT) medication to treat Justin's symptoms. This conversation was then brought to Justin's psychiatrist, who agreed to review the risks and potential benefits with Justin.

"Patients and their health care providers should have a dialogue to choose—together—the best treatment plan. I've heard from some patients that they hadn't been offered certain treatment options or weren't given a choice in the decision—that was the case for Justin," Rico says. "It is so important for patients to talk to their health care providers to learn about all available treatment options and find the one that is right for them."

Their relationship has enabled Justin to become an active participant in his journey of recovery and to accept his diagnosis. Since meeting Rico, Justin says he is happier and takes comfort in knowing someone is rooting for his progress, understands his struggles and won't judge him on those days when he feels he has come up short.

For more information on Justin's story, visit www.TreatOnceMonthly.com. The site also provides resources for individuals living with schizophrenia to help them understand treatment options and choose a medication that is right for them with the help of a health care professional.

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