

Stephanie Young

A Journey of Hope, Healing and Recovery

If you ask Stephanie Young about the challenges in her life, she begins her story with an abundance of gratitude. Gratitude to the Greenville Mental Health Center director, Dr. Al Edwards, Stephanie's supervisor, Amanda Wilson, and Marie Young. Gratitude to other Center staff and clients for loving her, accepting and treating her family's long history of mental illness, and "*for showing awesome support.*" She doesn't hesitate to name individuals like Shelley Hoppe at Greenville Vocational Rehabilitation, and Phil and Nancy Emory of Gateway House for also playing a big role in her recovery.

Her transformation from an individual, who struggled with mental illness and homelessness to college graduate, began with her own single-minded resolve to transcend her challenging circumstances. This fierce determination started as a small seed that grew within her as a child in foster care group homes and schools. As she watched her sister's life spiral out of control with victimization and mental illness, and even with her own similar challenges, she held on to hope that her life would be different.

But in 2001 Stephanie hit rock bottom financially, and emotionally. She was nearly homeless. She experienced debilitating panic attacks and severe anxiety resulting from work-related pressures. She could no longer function mentally or physically day to day. She lost her job and car. Her disability income was cut off, leaving her with no financial support.

Stephanie's emotional and financial obstacles still seemed insurmountable. "*I thought I would never be able to work, much less smile and have joy and peace in my life again.*" But as Stephanie explains, "*At this lowest point in my life, I reached a turning point. I thought that I could either go down or go up, and I chose to go up. I had to take a risk and try to improve my situation.*" Stephanie ultimately sought to regain Social Security Disability income. She applied and reapplied several times but ultimately was denied eligibility.

However, at a time in her life when she was experiencing overwhelming fear and anxiety, Stephanie had a valuable asset. She said her support system "*came in the form of prayers and encouragement from my immediate family, relatives, and the church. These individuals persisted in their support even during the times when I didn't feel like moving forward. They ultimately gave me the strength and courage to seek help from a variety of Greenville organizations.*"

Organizations like Vocational Rehabilitation that provided training and support, and taught her how to present herself professionally – skills she desperately needed when looking for work.



Goodwill Industries helped her improve communication skills, and validated and encouraged her abilities. United Ministries gave her job leads and bus tickets.

Stephanie's next big step was to explore educational opportunities. A Brown Mackie College advisor opened the door to the reality of earning an Associate degree in Health Administration in 2012, and a new profession. *"I even walked the stage to get my college diploma. My family was so proud of me as the first person in my immediate family to get a college degree. I also graduated with honors. That was the best day of my life! I had started work at the Greenville Mental Health Center in 2011 as a volunteer while going to college, and now I am a full time employee with benefits. I love working and earning a paycheck. I am contributing to society. I have value! What a blessing."*

"To the mentally ill community and our families, there is hope for us. And our future goals can be achieved, little by little with loving faith. I am grateful for the opportunity to tell my story. I hope that anyone who reads my story will be inspired."

Stephanie isn't finished just yet. Stephanie's future goals include marriage, becoming even more independent with her own home and car. And giving back to the community by working with children in foster care, and assisting with a feeding and clothing ministry to help others needing support. Not a bad resolution for an individual who proclaims *"I am a survivor!"* while still expressing gratitude to others for her own outstanding journey of hope, healing and recovery!

(Note: The Greenville Mental Health Center received written permission from Stephanie Young to write and publish this article on this website.)