

News from Portage Path Behavioral Health



Thomas Bailey stands center with Congressman Tim Ryan on his left and Mayor Dan Horrigan on his right at Lock 3 in Akron. PHOTO CREDIT: AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

## Finding His Place

32-year-old Thomas Bailey enters the room with a contagious smile and an eager willingness to share ... and there is a lot to tell. In life, and in his head, Thomas has spent many years searching for stability. For comfort. For peace. Finding his place has not come easy.

Thomas' family first began noticing the warning signs in adolescence when, after a nearly violent fight with his mother's then boyfriend, he was placed on the psychological floor at Children's Hospital. His next 16 years would be an emotional rollercoaster of depression, anxiety and Bipolar Disorder.

Dealing with the onset of mental illness in one's confusing teenage years is particularly difficult, as was the case for Thomas. Struggling to understand what he was happening inside his head and at times considering suicide, Thomas labored academically and made some poor choices which brought legal trouble.

Through it all, Thomas managed to hold on to his love for running, earning two varsity letters, and graduated on time from North High School in 2003. Things seemed to be looking up.

Two weeks after graduation, Thomas and his family were told they were being evicted from their apartment. His mother and sister left to live with a family friend. Due to Thomas' troubling behavior—shoplifting and underage drinking, Thomas was left to fend for himself.

"I was out in the streets for 6 months," says Thomas. "It was rough and difficult. I was looked at funny, I was jumped every other day, there were a few times someone spit on me – in my face. It was horrible. That's when the depression came back."

Found in a tent by the police near Cascade Village, Thomas stayed at the Haven of Rest for two weeks, until his pastor offered a helping hand and a safe place to stay. He stayed for the next ten months.

Sometime around Labor Day in 2005, Thomas was crossing the street on his way home one evening when a careless driver ran a red light and slammed directly into the side of his body. Thomas was literally knocked out of his shoes. He suffered a traumatic brain injury, a few broken bones, and injured his spleen and lung.

"I had to learn how to do everything again," he remembers. "How to walk, how to speak, and motor skills. I was in the hospital for 2 months. Sports and game shows kept me going".

In 2008, Thomas found himself at Portage Path Psychiatric Emergency Services (PES) after an emotional crisis, and was subsequently referred to Portage Path's partial hospitalization program for follow-up outpatient care. Partial hospitalization provides a structured, half-day program that helps participants learn and practice essential life skills, and regain a sense of hopefulness about the future. It's more intense than care you get in a doctor's or therapist's office. Thomas completed the 13-week program, and then enrolled in group therapy to help his Depression, Anxiety and Bipolar Disorder.

While in treatment, Thomas was urged to consider applying to college. The \$50,000 settlement he received from the car accident made this possible.

Thomas applied to a few schools and was accepted to The University of Akron. Thomas thought this may be his chance to turn his life around, but he soon found that college was not the experience he had hoped for. As Thomas began his freshman year, the old demons crept back in. He started to feel inferior and judged. He was struggling to make friends. He began withdrawing. Thomas' therapist at Portage Path suggested he go through the partial hospitalization again, so he did.

During his sophomore year, Thomas received a barrage of life-changing news. First, he found out he was going to be a father. Later that year, after finally addressing some lingering health concerns, he learned that he was diabetic. These life changes, along with mounting debt, effectively ended his college career.

While some would have run from responsibility, especially when facing serious physical and mental illnesses, Thomas found a light in his daughter and wanted nothing more than to be a good father. He wanted to break the cycle of "deadbeat dads" and be better than his own father was to him. Being a good father isn't easy in the best of circumstances. It's especially difficult when you're living with serious mental illness.

One day, Thomas had a huge argument with the mother of his daughter, leaving him seething, ready to unleash a healthy dose of spite. Unaware that he was in the midst of a manic episode, Thomas proposed to a woman he had been seeing for a week. The mania side of Bipolar often includes symptoms such as inflated ego, ability to function without sleep, and extreme highs that lead to risky behaviors which can compromise one's safety. Actions often include things like reckless sexual affairs, gambling, drugs, alcohol, and thrilling activities that may be out of character.

The engagement did not last long, crashing to a halt when Thomas learned that his then-fiancé was underage.

After many more months of counseling, Thomas began to find his rhythm and his place. Thomas became a member of CHOICES, a safe place for people struggling with mental health and addiction issues to gather. CHOICES provides a social, recreational, educational, resourceful, and empowered center for adults, with materials for arts and crafts, games, and other activities that may serve as coping skills for members.

CHOICES proved to be a productive outlet for Thomas to use his experiences living with mental illness to help others trying to find their way. He now even serves on the CHOICES Advisory Board.

This new sense of purpose helped Thomas turn his life toward a more positive direction. In 2015, he got married, with his daughter serving as the flower girl and her mother as a bridesmaid. Thomas and his new wife are both involved at CHOICES, helping others and working to stop the stigma around mental illness.

Last July, Thomas courageously lent his voice to the Change Direction event in Akron. This event, held at Lock 3 in Akron and covered by the Beacon Journal (a photo of Thomas was featured in the story), was part of a nationwide effort to change the culture of mental health so that all of those in need receive the care and support they deserve.

Thomas is very proud of his volunteer position on the board of CHOICES and loves being able to help others learn from his experiences. It's been an arduous journey, and he knows he still has a long way to go. Thomas still sees his counselor regularly, and takes medication to help with the symptoms of his mental health issues. Though still in recovery, Thomas is strengthened and comforted by the support of his family, which, he says with a twinkle in his eye, is about to grow by one.



## OPA Legislative Day

Recently our own Chivonna Childs, PhD attended the Ohio Psychological Association (OPA) Legislative Day at the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus. Chivonna was recognized by, and introduced to, Senator Charleta Tavares and also met Senator Vernon Sykes.

Chivonna describes the experience as, "a tremendous opportunity to talk with Senators from across the state about the importance of obtaining prescriptive rights for psychologists, addressing high imprisonment rates of the mentally ill, and the state of mental health care across the country."

In the photo to the right are (l to r) Dr. Jessica Smedley, Dr. Chivonna Childs, Charleta Tavares and Dr. Leslie McClure .



## Worth Knowing

July is **National Minority Mental Health Month**. Did you know these facts about multicultural mental health?

- Researchers found that black and Hispanic young people were less able to get mental health services than white children and young adults in a 2014 study.

- American Indians & Alaska Natives have the highest rate of mental health conditions among all communities.

- Even today, provider bias and lack of cultural sensitivity result in misdiagnosis and people dropping out of care.

To learn more and help raise awareness of these issues, keep an eye on Portage Path's **Facebook** page this month for posts and information relating to National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month.

## MULTICULTURAL MENTAL HEALTH



### Does Mental Health Matter?

Mental health directly and indirectly impacts all of us.



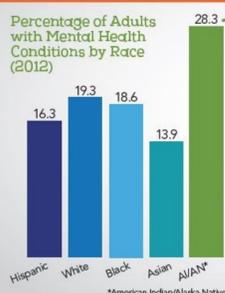
**1 in every 5 adults** in the U.S. experiences a mental health condition.  
**1 in every 5 children** ages 13-18 have or will have a serious mental health condition.

Mental health is part of overall health. Mental health conditions cause changes in thoughts, feelings and mood.

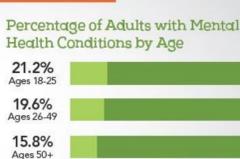
Mental health conditions can affect many areas of your life including: home, work, school, relationships with others, sleep, appetite, decision making and may worsen other medical problems.

### Does Mental Health Affect My Community?

Culture, race, ethnicity, gender, age and sexual orientation influence mental health care rates, attitudes, access and treatment.



At 28.3%, American Indians and Alaska Natives have the highest rate of mental health conditions among all communities.



Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender & Questioning (LGBTQ) youth are 2 to 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than straight youth.  
LGBTQ individuals are 2 or more times more likely as straight individuals to have a mental health condition.