



## *Client Success Story - Larry Earle*

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*Larry Earle is a proud OPG employee whose life was derailed when he began experiencing bipolar disorder around age 40. He lost everything – his family, his job, his car and driver's license, his life savings. With the help of DMHS' Supportive Housing Program, Larry is putting the pieces back together. He sat down with David Clarke to share a little about his life story and his experiences with DMHS.*

### Larry's Story

As a child, I was an athlete, I was into every sport. Looking back, I can see that mental illness ran in our family – my father had undiagnosed bipolar disorder, one sibling is diagnosed with depression. I believe my own problems started at an early age and I used marijuana to mask a lot of what was happening.

I worked for OPG as a heavy equipment operator for over 30 years, mostly out of the Mississauga-Lakeview Station. I had a perfect record – commendations, no sick days, I took all the training courses on offer. When Mississauga-Lakeview started to close down, I went to Nanticoke to work. This separated me from my wife and two children. I was in an unfamiliar place in the middle of nowhere, working different shifts than I was used to and I felt really isolated.



For the first time in my life, I started feeling depressed – I'd never even had a sick day so I could not understand what was happening. I couldn't do the job that I was very well trained at and very successful at for many years, I started not being able to sleep good, I had very high levels of anxiety, my confidence level dropped right down. I saw my family doctor who told me about a "miracle pill," Prozac, which I started taking.

I just wanted to come home and OPG agreed to return me to Mississauga-Lakeview. But the problems continued and actually got worse. Everything just went strange – I was up, I was down – mostly down. I tried committing suicide, multiple times – I had a lot of pills at home. After the first attempt I was in a coma for three days. This was the worst time in my life.

I went off work on a medical leave and was admitted to hospitals in Toronto numerous times, brought in by family mostly, a couple of times by police. I experienced what I consider inhumane treatment, being strapped down against my will and given knockout drugs. I found hospital life very scary – I saw fist-fights, was roomed with people who were very ill and unpredictable, I found the staff sometimes uncaring and unresponsive and the facilities unclean. I was administered over 100 ECTs (electro convulsive therapy). Whenever I came to, I just thanked God I had survived it. I was given a series of conflicting diagnoses, a different one for every doctor. All of this completely took away my pride, my dignity – I felt broken down to zero. Everytime I left the hospital, I just wanted to die.

Ultimately I ended up as a long-term inpatient at Ontario Shores, in total for almost two years. After three tryouts with community housing that didn't work out, my social worker Brian Bengay contacted DMHS Supportive Housing, and Jack and Dane came to visit me. This began the process that led me to enter McKay House as a resident of DMHS Supportive Housing in September 2013.

Within a week, I felt like a human being again. The staff there are unbelievable, they treated me with respect. I had felt so stigmatized by doctors and by the mental health system for so many years that this treatment came as a huge surprise and relief. It brought me back to life, brought back my spirit, my confidence. It wasn't medication that did this, it was the relationships. I felt that I had friends – I hate to call them workers! They took time and listened anything I had to share. They go out of their way to take care of matters of concern to residents, and they do it happily. You can tell it is not a chore. It just blows me away. I am glad to have the chance to give back in different ways, whether helping with snow removal or joining the consumer advocacy group V.A.S.E.

I am now hoping I will get my job back at OPG – they are a great company and I had a great track record. Things are going very well with my family. My wife and I are separated currently but getting reacquainted and rebuilding trust. My relationship with my two children is back to normal. I'm focused on staying healthy – taking my medication, getting proper sleep, walking two to three miles a day, eating healthy, attending doctor's appointments. I'm upgrading my computer skills – I'm learning a lot.

All I can say is, Thank God for Durham Mental Health Services. I feel that I owe them my life.