

## Back On His Feet

Drop-In Center and Peers' PLACE staff member Jonathan Lane has a lot to be happy about. A former recipient of Unity House services and a current employee, Jon is living proof that recovery from mental illness is not only possible, but can be deeply affirming and life-changing.

As a freshman at the University of Maryland at College Park, Jonathan experienced his first breakdown. He had a black out during class and when the police came for him, he had no idea what had happened.

"It was really difficult to get back on my feet," says Jon. "It took eight years until I really felt 'better'. I consider myself to be smart, articulate, and creative, but for five or six years after the initial breakdown, I couldn't do math or write creatively. I was very depressed by this but it was exciting to rediscover this talent as I got well."

Jon was ultimately diagnosed with schizophrenic affective disorder, a mix of bi-polar and schizophrenia. He now manages his mental illness with medication and daily living skills he learned through Unity House.

Jonathan moved to Skaneateles in 2007 to be with his father. He received therapy at Cayuga County Mental Health, and a counselor there suggested Unity House. Jon was accepted into the mental health residential program at the Case mansion. He is now living happily and independently in his own apartment.

"One biggie I had to learn was: don't do too much. I can't let my mind get overexcited for too long. I strive to keep an even keel and my meds work perfectly for me. I am incredibly fortunate that I'm as high functioning as I am," explains Jon.

About six years ago, Jonathan was hired at the Drop-In Center. The paid position offered twenty hours a week, which Jon describes as "intricate and intense" at times. Four years later, he was also hired to help ease the transition when Unity House assumed oversight of Peers' PLACE from Cayuga County Mental Health.



Jon now works 25 hours a week for Unity House and says "I am blessed to have this job. I can help others know how good they can feel about their own lives. I am a positive influence and I do a good job."

His co-workers admire his dedication and influence too. "Jon is very calming and balances everyone else," said IR Practitioner Vanessa Gibson. PROS Director Jean Winne agrees, saying: "Jon is fabulous. He's extremely bright and artistic, and a real asset to the program. I am encouraging him to become peer certified. He is reliable and just wonderful with the program participants."

When he's not working, Jonathan enjoys cooking, drawing, playing Dungeons and Dragons, and hanging out with his girlfriend. "She's been so helpful. Having her in my life makes me so much more effective at my job. If I'm happy at home, I'm happy at work."