Signs of Hope for Families Living with Autism

On August 1st over 150 friends and colleagues gathered at the Holiday Inn by the Bay, Portland ME for the 14th Annual Heroes with Heart Celebration to honor police officers, firefighters, hospital heroes and our community’s Unsung Heroes with Heart. The theme was “It’s Really Nice to Know That I’m Not Alone.”

Several months ago Tony realized he was in need of support for some emotional issues he was experiencing. “I was feeling really depressed, nervous and panicked at work and throughout my life,” Tony explained. “It was getting in the way of doing the things that I love, like acting, and interfered with my interpersonal relationships with the people around me. I just wanted to get better and manage these feelings.”

Having previously received therapy through the Maine Behavioral Healthcare (MBH) Portland outpatient clinic, Tony felt comfortable seeking out a continuation of his earlier therapy services.

But this time was different. Instead of booking an appointment for a one-on-one therapy session it was suggested he participate in a therapeutic group as an alternative. The group recommended for him, The Power of Groups, is run by Linda Johnson, LCSW. The group uses Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) techniques to help participants learn how they think and understand that those thoughts may lead to obsessions thinking.

“My clients often describe that their brain can’t shut off – or their brain is too busy,” said Dr. Siegel. “Many struggle with cognitive distortions, like acting, and interfered with my interpersonal relationships with the people around me. I just wanted to get better and manage these feelings.”

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The evening ended with special gifts to attendees – small stones hand painted by children at the Center for Autism and Developmental Disorders with the word “hope.” These little tokens of gratitude represent the lives which will be made better thanks to the compassion of our donors as we continue to announce the establishment of the Developmental Disorders Unit at Spring Harbor Hospital over a decade ago. The name recognizes his contributions for his 35-year career as he prepares for retirement.

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One skill Tony has found particularly helpful is simple fact checking. “If I’m anxious about a conversation, I check off the things I’m worried about beforehand,” he says. “Having that extra support will help me deal with it.”

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