REFRESH EDITOR

ished during the last three arl Shallowhorn has flourdecades. Great marriage. Successful professional career. Wide circle of friends.

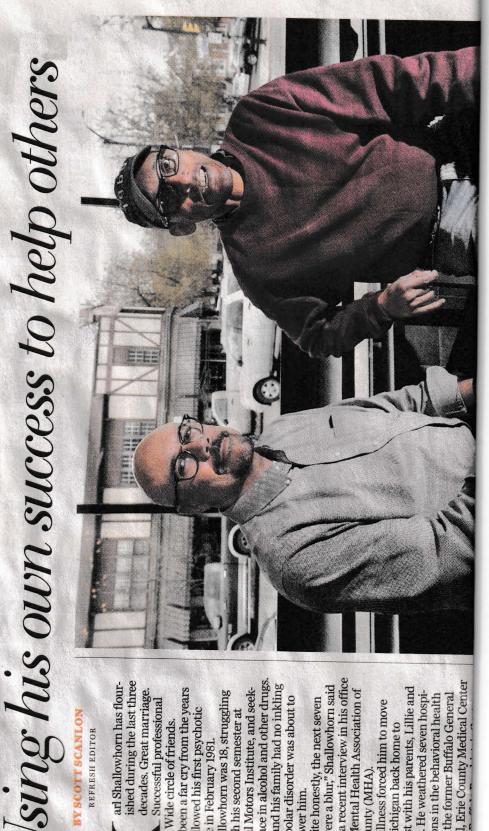
It's been a far cry from the years that followed his first psychotic episode in February 1981.

ing solace in alcohol and other drugs. He and his family had no inkling General Motors Institute, and seek-Shallowhorn was 18, struggling through his second semester at

during a recent interview in his office years were a blur," Shallowhorn said at the Mental Health Association of "Quite honestly, the next seven Erie County (MHA). overpower him.

that bipolar disorder was about to

Hospital, Erie County Medical Center Amherst with his parents, Lillie and Charles. He weathered seven hospitalizations in the behavioral health units at the former Buffalo General His illness forced him to move from Michigan back home to



and the buntary resychiatric Center.

The turning point came 30 years ago next month, when a counselor encouraged him to attend a recovery program meeting. Such meetings have been part of his wellness strategy since.

Shailowhorn, a certified alcohol and substance abuse counselor, has worked at Buffalo General Medical Center and Horizon Health Services. He has spent the past four years as director of community advocacy for both the MHA and Compeer, the latter a nonprofit that trains those who've overcome mental health challenges to mentor peers.

He will leave those posts later this month to bring the Therapy Live Prepare U program to schools across New York State. The program is designed to help students of all ages to become more aware about mental health, and how to better address mental illness.

Mental Health Association Executive Director Kenneth Houseknecht said the Mental Health First Aid and Mindset workplace mental health education programs Shallowhorn helped established will continue with those Shallowhorn helped train.

"We're not losing an employee, we're gaining an ally," Houseknecht said. What they will miss, he said, is Shallowhorn's ability to look others with mental illnesses in the eye and say, "You know what? You can have a serious, lifelong mental health

"Recovery is possible. You can get better." – Karl Shallowhorn, left, director of community advocacy with the Mental Health Association and a peer mentor with Compeer, talking with Terrance Johnson, a young man he mentors. John Hickey/Buffalo News

challenge and still live a full, productive, happy, meaningful life, and I'm living proof of that."

Shallowhorn, 55, and his wife, Suzy, have two daughters, Sarah, 22, and Lillie, 19.

"I caused a lot of havoc in my family years ago but my parents supported me," Shallowhorn said. "I had extended family that supported me and I had some close friends who were good. I was supported, which a lot of people don't have, unfortunately."

Q. What can you do to replace that? Is there another way?

There is, and a lot of people have to go the route of peer support, reaching out to others, whether it be in recovery programs that are mental health-related or otherwise. That can be crucial. I used Peer Connection through my recovery program.

Q. What would you like people to

know about the job your leaving?
Working at the MHA and Compeer has been tremendously rewarding. It far exceeded any expectations I had

when I started, especially the ability to not only grow professionally but to help people. I've been able to do the work I've been called to do. I hope to rejoin the MHA board and will continue to visit with my Compeer friend, Terrance Johnson.

Q. You say self-disclosure helps in

Years ago, I just wanted to tell my story. Recovery is possible. You can get better. Once I started doing that, it was liberating to be able to say, This is who I am. I'm OK. There's nothing to be afraid of, despite what we see sometimes in movies or TV, or even on the news. Most people living with mental health challenges don't fit that profile... In the end it's about recovery, about giving hope.

Q. What clicked for you?

First and foremost, I realized that by using drugs my mental health condition was getting worse and unless I stopped using, I couldn't get better. Also, when I stopped using, I felt better. Things became more clear and focused. I realized that I could

have a life, finally.

Q. What are some of the key steps that you've taken to address your mental health condition and the negative things that came with it?

exercise. I got into that almost 20 years Being linked with professional helr fortunate over time to have good treat practice my faith regularly. Also, I have ment. Mind you, early on it was tough still take medication. That's a big part because finding the right medication therapist over time. I've had the good fortune to have good psychiatrists to strong in my faith. I go to church and ago and do that regularly. I try to get a good support system of friends and is first and foremost. I've been very help me find the right medication. I of my recovery. Another big part is good sleep. For people with bipolar extended family. This is my tool kit, disorder, sleep is really critical. I'm was difficult, but I've had a great

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