



**COMMUNITY
SUPPORT
SERVICES**

LIFE CHAT

A publication spotlighting CSS clients

February 2023

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We want to hear from you!

For details about Recovery Advisory Council (RAC) or to contribute your artwork or recovery story to Life Chat, please contact Narkeetah Brazil at 330-253-9388, ext. 165.

Road to recovery leads to 'Comeback Evolution'

Longtime clients' life showcased in book, film

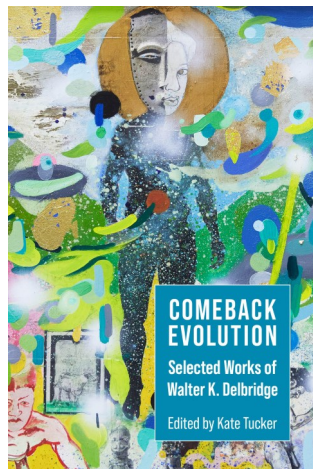
By Angie Younessi, CSS Communications Associate

At age 75, CSS client Walter K. Delbridge has a long and accomplished life to reflect upon, including his involvement with the civil rights movement; his studies at Harvard, Yale and Morehouse; and having his poetry published alongside that of Langston Hughes, Leadbelly and Gwendolyn Brooks. Those would be noteworthy achievements for anyone, but for someone like Walter - who has struggled with lifelong mental health challenges - they are exceptional.

Walter's remarkable story inspired his longtime friend, singer-songwriter Kate Tucker, to bring his successes and struggles to light with "*Comeback Evolution: Selected Works of Walter K. Delbridge*." The book is not just a collection of Walter's poems but a celebration of his life and spirit. Tucker also is working on the forthcoming documentary, "*Tell It Like It Is: The Life and Work of Walter K. Delbridge*."

Indeed, Walter's comeback continues to evolve. His story is woven together with brilliance, setbacks, achievements and illness. By the time he arrived at CSS in the 1990s, he'd already experienced decades of struggles. He'd abandoned his studies at Morehouse after Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, disillusioned when fellow students' views clashed with his. He instead delved into controversial new theories of physics and ESP. He struggled with a romantic breakup. He was deemed "out of touch with reality" by a school psychologist and sent home to live with his mother. Eventually, he was diagnosed with schizophrenia and was institutionalized.

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"Comeback Evolution" explores the life and writings of poet and CSS client Walter K. Delbridge, pictured at right. Photo by Miriam Bennett.

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In time, Walter was well enough to return to school, landing a graduate assistant position at the University of Akron where he excelled in his classes. But his life was again hijacked by despair when his 20-year-old brother was murdered. "That sent me into a tailspin," Walter recalls.

The cycle of hospitalizations and recovery continued. "Since 1970, I would get over one thing...and it would be something else," he said. "I've been under supervision in the mental health system for 50 years."

Through treatment, Walter learned to see situations more objectively and not rely simply on emotion. He encourages others who are struggling to "Search. Persist. Try things out...Don't get paranoid. Ask questions (to clarify). Seeming 'knowledge' turns into delusions."

Through the years, one thing has remained constant in Walter's life: his love of the written word - creating it or reading it. Today, his time is spent in "constant study," reading about Buddhism, meditations on music, and the future.

And then there's his own writing. Spinning his thoughts into poetry has carried Walter through long stretches of isolation, including a particularly prolific 24-hour period where he wrote a cycle of 133 poems he calls "*Isolation and Intellect*."

Through Tucker's involvement, Walter's words have also sprung from the page and into the ears of live audiences. In 2017, he read his poetry to a sold-out crowd at the Rubber City Jazz and Blues Festival, and he was a featured guest at CSS' Art of Recovery in 2019. This past fall, the University of Akron and GAR Foundation hosted a book release celebration at E.J. Thomas Hall where Walter joined other artists in reading his poems to songs composed for the occasion by jazz musician Theron Brown.

Even with projects on the horizon, Walter grounds himself in the "now." Being present keeps his thoughts from wandering backwards or straying too far forward. "Now" is where he wants to be.

"Mindfulness keeps my mind not hung up on the past. I get the most out of the present, ongoing flow of life," he said. "People ruminate on the past...they miss the value of the present moment." ♦

Experience Walter's poetry and read more about his remarkable story, written by CSS friend and accomplished writer/musician Kate Tucker, at www.comebackevolution.com.



Walter at the Rubber City Jazz and Blues Festival. Photo by Miriam Bennett

Partnership with disability agency benefits CSS clients

By Joel Voorman, SE Recovery Specialist

Community Support Services' Supported Employment program has partnered with Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD), a state agency, to offer a wider menu of services to our clients.

OOD provides guidance to individuals with disabilities who are seeking employment and helps them choose an employment goal based on strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, capabilities and interests.

Client Steven Snowberger recently took advantage of this partnership to receive assistance starting his business. His company, Majesticcoat Epoxy Flooring, launched this year and already is experiencing success.

Steven's interest in pursuing his business came after he struggled to find a job that was a good fit with his degree in information technology. He relied on his mechanical inclination and past work experiences in manufacturing to learn how to create epoxy flooring while helping to renovate a rental property. He also finished a floor for his employer.

Steven worked with his Supported Employment specialist at CSS and his OOD vocational rehabilitation counselor to get linked with a self-employment agency provided through OOD funding. Additional OOD financial assistance helped with equipment and supply costs, website creation and promotional items that helped him get his business up and running in just a few months.

In addition to running his own business, Steven remains employed with a company that builds patio enclosures, where he is able to market his company's services to customers.

"I have a better sense of pride and accomplishment. Once the business becomes more successful, I'll have much more financial freedom," he said. "I've been stuck at a salary ceiling. I decided that if I don't want that ceiling, I had to start my own gig and let my hard work take me to where I want to be." ♦



“I was a nobody who became a somebody”

When I was young and in my childhood years, I was told I was nothing,
 And coming from the ones I loved, whose hearts were cold and unloving,
 And many times, I asked myself, is this true, am I doomed before I got started,
 Is this the existence that I'm living in, has already been mapped out and charted?
 How could this be, I asked myself, can everything they've said be true,
 That I'll be a failure and disappointment in everything I say or do?
 Am I not enough for someone, to see all the beauty I possess inside?
 For no matter what they say or do, I will never want to make them cry!
 ...But time goes by so quickly, and into adulthood I have carried my pain.
 Is there an answer to calm my heart, and then I call out my Savior's name!
 For his Word tells me, that "I have been fearfully and wonderfully made,"
 And with his words he spoke my existence, and unlike others, "He Knows My Name!"
 So, it shouldn't matter what others may say, it's Him I should look unto,
 Because His love for me is unconditional and He loves me through and through!

-*Shari, RAC member*

Supported Employment Services Success Story

By Joel Voorman, *SE Recovery Specialist*

Tangela Ridley came to CSS' Supported Employment Department in 2016 in search of help to meet her goals of finding a sustainable job.

She began working with Supported Employment Specialist Alisa Harris, who assisted Tangela in setting job goals, creating a resume, practicing job interview skills, locating job leads and submitting job applications.

"Alisa is great! She was very consistent and eager to help," Tangela said. "She was willing to help me find a good fit that met all of my needs."

Coupled with Alisa's guidance, Tangela put in a great deal of hard work on her own and soon found a job at Goodwill. She has since been promoted twice and recently celebrated her sixth anniversary with the company. She currently works as a new-goods processor and is responsible for intake of new inventory for Goodwill retail stores.

"I think the best part of my job is getting to work with good people, and I get to not only help people but help Goodwill with their mission," she said.

Several years after landing her job, Tangela continues to work with the Supported Employment Department's Michell Montgomery, who provides ongoing support to assure Tangela maintains her success and manages her benefits by reporting work wages to Social Security and Jobs and Family Services.

"I would definitely recommend it because CSS has been an anchor for me, not only for my mental health services but employment services especially," Tangela said. "If I ever need help with paperwork for work or things like that, CSS is always there. I never have to do it on my own."

As for Tangela's future goals? "I want to move up at Goodwill. I want to move up into an office position. I've maintained two other positions since I have been there, and I am gradually moving up," she said. "I'm not at the exact spot I want to be, but I'm going to keep working until I get there." ♦



Tangela Ridley



COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES

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Art of Recovery is almost here!

The eighth annual Art of Recovery is set for 5:30 p.m. March 14 at Akron Art Museum! Join us for a night celebrating the artistic expression of CSS clients in recovery. The event will showcase 40+ works of client-created artwork, which will be available for purchase through an online auction. The night also will feature heavy appetizers, an awards presentation and more! For updates and ticket details, visit www.cssbh.org/artofrecovery.



Mission Statement

Community Support Services: Helping you achieve a healthy mind and body while supporting you to live and work in your community.

Recovery Definition

Recovery is the continuous process of empowering an individual so he or she may live a satisfying and contributing life. It is a shared responsibility among the individual, the treatment staff, family, friends, and the community to:

- Discover or rediscover strengths and abilities
- Pursue personal goals
- Develop a sense of self-identity that allows the person to grow beyond his or her diagnosis

The Recovery Advisory Council is a collaborative effort with clients & family members to continuously improve the satisfaction of services for all Community Support Services clients.

