

Mental illness leads to homelessness

Kevin Robichaud's story

I suffered a mental health crisis that led me to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto seeking treatment and therapy in June 2018. I sought treatment and therapy from this point onward with limited success in the first 4 years. In October 2021, an incident occurred where charges were laid against me and my probation order stated that I could not return to my apartment. Because I couldn't return, I couldn't make an inventory of items and supervise the movers taking the items from the apartment to the moving truck. When the movers got to my new address, they decided to take my belongings hostage and demanded a payment nearly 4 times higher to bring the items to my unit and complete the move. I did not have that amount of money available because I had lost my job by not showing up when I struggled to make bail and was stuck in the Toronto South Detention Centre for 4 weeks. Even though the police were called, and text messages were shown, there was nothing they could do to stop the movers from taking my belongings and clothing hostage for two reasons: there was no inventory listing items taken from my apartment, and I had not been able to supervise the move of each item from the unit into the moving truck (yes, movers taking furniture hostage is a thing — check the government of Canada website).

A month after I ended up in crisis, mainly because of the stressors, I was hospitalized a third time. The good thing is that before my release, a case worker at CAMH completed an application with me for the Mental Health and Justice Housing wait list with Toronto's centralized service called Access Point. After two months of sleeping on the floor without a phone and groceries, I was able to come up with half of the ransom amount, using the limited funds from my now-fixed income as I was no longer working. The movers returned half of my furnishings and clothing to me. Luckily, a case worker at CAMH helped me make arrangements with the Furniture Bank to help source furnishings that I could neither afford to be returned nor replaced. In the meantime, the crisis continued, as I sought ongoing treatment and therapy that proved unsuccessful. My behaviour was unmanageable and more incidents occurred where charges were laid against me that would once again prevent me from returning to my apartment, which I could no longer afford and from which I was being evicted.

During another hospitalization, four years after the start of the debilitating symptoms, CAMH along with my family doctor helped identify treatments to which I responded and finally, the recovery phase of my journey started. Of the 43 charges I managed to accumulate over the two worst years of my life, at the height of the symptoms and crisis, 37 were dropped through the mental health court with the support of the team at Fred Victor. I was homeless for two years when I received a call from Access Point (that's 3 years after the application was submitted) regarding a housing opportunity that came up through one of their agencies, the Canadian Mental Health Association - Toronto branch (CMHA-TO). After 3 months of evaluation of my mental health, justice issues, legal challenges, and housing history by CMHA-TO, a housing offer was made. I accepted and moved in on April 27, 2024.